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MANLINESS
AND OTHER SERMONS

HUGH STOWELL BROWN



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MANLINESS AND OTHER SERMONS

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PRINTED BY

MORRISON AND GIBB, EDINBURGH,

FOR

OLIPHANT, ANDERSON, & FERRIER,

EDINBURGH AND LONDON.

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MANLINESS

AND OTHER SERMONS

BY

HUGH STOWELL BROWN

WITH PREFACE

BY

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D.D.

OLIPHANT ANDERSON & FERRIER

EDINBURGH

AND 24 OLD BAILEY LONDON

1889

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PREFACE.

THE present volume owes its origin to a daughter's loving toil. Mrs. Haig has selected and deciphered the manuscripts of the sermons contained in it,—no easy task, as Mr. Brown's correspondents will know, and made more difficult in the case of manuscripts meant only for his own use, by numerous abbreviations of his own invention. The difficulties thence arising have been overcome by much care, but have delayed the publication. The Rev. D. A. Taylor, M.A., Mr. Brown's son-in-law, has rendered valuable help in seeing the book through the press and otherwise.

I had the happiness of close association and friendship with Mr. Brown for thirty years, and am thankful for the opportunity of laying a last tribute on his monument. This little book is but a slender memorial of so long and remarkable a ministry, but it will serve, at least, to recall to those who knew him, some of his most characteristic traits of character and style of preaching. He was an unique personality in the English pulpit. In nothing were his appetite for and capacity of work more manifest than in the careful preparation of all his sermons, which was never neglected. Those who only knew him as a lecturer, in every corner of the country, wondered how he found time to preach; those who knew his elaborate and written preparation of sermons, wondered how he found time to

lecture. Few of the most leisurely of preachers have given, through life, a larger amount of hard, honest work to the study of Scripture and the preparation of their discourses, than did this man, who for half his life had no leisure. The persistent consistency with which he carried on directly expository preaching throughout his whole ministry was not the least of the particulars in which Mr. Brown set an example to his brethren. If he finished his comments on a book of Scripture on one Sunday, he began another series of expositions on another book next Sunday. He did not pretend to finished scholarship, but he had more than many who do; and all which he had was diligently used, under the guidance of a remarkably shrewd and vigorous intellect, for the grasping of the meaning of Scripture. This volume contains abundant illustrations of his homely sagacity, his humour, his sarcasm, his boldness of rebuke, his abhorrence of oratorical and all other affectation, his strong, nervous, direct style, his unwearied effort to widen and exalt the popular conception of Christian character, and the energy which bent all his gifts to bring home his convictions of Scripture truth to the minds and consciences of the average mass of hearers. Such qualities in their union in the degree in which he possessed them are too rare and too valuable to be allowed to fade utterly, and this attempt to preserve some memorial, which is due to his daughter's pious affection, and has been asked for by many friends, will help to keep the memory of them fresh for a little while longer. We preachers have to be contented with an ephemeral reputation, which dies with the last survivor who has heard our voices. These sermons of my dear friend's cannot reproduce the characteristic manner, the conclusive nod of the head, the twinkle of the bright eyes, the expression of the mobile lips, the tones of the voice, sometimes sarcastic, sometimes tremulous with sup-

pressed emotion, but always forceful and arresting. Nor can they reveal the fund of tenderness which underlay the surface of strength and sometimes roughness. It needed a friendship as long and close as that which made so much of my Lancashire life, and which has left such imperishable remembrances with me, to fathom that generally concealed depth.

But those of us who knew him best, and had been with him in his hours of sorrow as well as of mirth, knew how tender was the core, and how, if he had any affectation, it was the affectation of seeming to be harder than he really was. I speak for others as well as for myself, when I say that we older men, who have worked with Mr. Brown for a generation in unbroken harmony, feel that much of our lives was laid in his grave, and that there are no new friendships to be made, strong and unchangeable like that which knit us to him, and of which I am honoured by being permitted the expression here.

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I.

MANLINESS.

A DISCOURSE TO YOUNG MEN.

‘Quit you like men.’—1 Cor. xvi. 13.

THE word ‘quit’ appears to be very nearly related to the word ‘quite.’ This latter word is expressive of completeness,—such a thing is ‘quite true,’ that is, completely true; such another thing is quite false, that is, completely false. Quite right and quite wrong mean altogether right and altogether wrong. And the exhortation given in the text, ‘Quit you like men,’ means, be quite as men, be completely, altogether men, with nothing unmanly about you in thought, word, or deed.

Now this is a very rare accomplishment. Few, in all respects and completely, quit themselves as men; few are *quite* as men.

Of course, to quit oneself as men usually do, to be quite as men usually are, is easy enough and common enough; but this is not what Paul means. There is a quitting ourselves as men, which in this

very epistle he strongly disapproves. I turn to chapter iii., and in the third verse read thus: ‘For whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?’ Now there is the appearance of inconsistency in that the apostle here speaks with disapproval of walking as men, while in the text he commands and commends it. But the Greeks had two words, each of which means ‘man;’ and while one is commonly used to describe the generality of men, the average man, and the man below the average, —the other word is commonly employed to describe men of a better and nobler cast of character. It is the baser word which Paul uses when he says, ‘Are ye not carnal, and walk as men?’ It is the higher that we find in the text, ‘Quit you like men.’ The men in these two passages are by no means men of the same sort. The former are men, as distinguished from beasts; the latter are men, as distinguished from the common run of men by their superiority.

When Paul says, ‘Quit you like men,’ he means, not quit you as men commonly do, but as they ought to do. But where is the standard for this word ‘ought,’ as they ought to do? I, for my part, most firmly believe that we have the highest, the best, and the only safe and perfect standard in

the Bible, in the teaching and example of Jesus Christ. All the other standards that I know of appear to be unsatisfactory, deficient; yes, all. Some place the quitting oneself as a man in mere animal courage, a property in which man seldom equals some of the beasts. Some place the quitting oneself as a man in stoical indifference to suffering, or an endurance of suffering without uttering a complaint. The very most that can be said for such ideas of quitting ourselves like men is, that they may be in a measure right, but they are defective. They do not make us quite as men. The most courageous man that ever lived, and the most stoical man that ever lived, might be in many respects, in most respects, very far from quitting themselves like men.

The only perfect pattern is Jesus Christ. In Him we see what God is; in Him also we see what man is, when he quits himself as man. The man Christ Jesus is a great boon to the world, because He is the unfallen, unmarred, unblemished type of the human race. In Christ we see human nature as human nature ought to be, may be, and by God's grace will be; for this is God's great final purpose in all the work of redemption, that we should be conformed to the image of His Son.

But now to notice rather more in detail what we may understand by quitting ourselves like men.

First, then, I would say, in quitting ourselves like men, let us be truthful men. Very often cowardice is at the bottom of untruthfulness. We fear to speak what we know or believe to be true lest we should give offence, lest we should suffer ; and to hide our fault we take refuge in untruthfulness, lest the discovery of it should involve us in trouble. Such cowardice, I need not say, is unmanly. By all means let us have the courage to speak the truth, come what may. Not that we are in duty bound to tell all we know to be true ; all, for instance, that we know to be true of this person's character and that person's conduct. It may even be our duty to give information to a neighbour's disadvantage ; but, should it become a matter of duty to say anything, however unpleasant it may be to say it, whatever consequences it may lead to, then let us not shrink from it. And truthfulness implies honesty—honesty and truthfulness in conduct. There may be something very clever in artful and deceitful conduct ; but in such conduct, a man does not quit himself like a man, in the nobler and better sense of the word. Jesus, the Perfect Man, says, 'I am the truth,' indicating that every man who professes to be a man ought to be

truthful. And if we give due force to the syllable 'full,' which is affixed to so many words, if attention were called to it, by writing and printing it 'FULL,' instead of having our attention drawn off by the omission of the last letter,—if, I say, we clearly understood this affixed syllable, we should learn much that now escapes us. Truthful, that is, full of truth; not a mind in which there is a mixture of the true and the false, but one which the truth fills, to the exclusion of all that is false.

If we would quit ourselves like men, let us be diligent men. In an idle life there is something unmanly. Some, under the heavy pressure of hard toil, may perhaps be excused, if they wish that they were free, that they had nothing to do but, as they say, to enjoy themselves. But we have reason to be thankful if we have work to occupy us.

The enjoyment of freedom from work is all a delusion. If we wish to enjoy life we must work, and work with a will, work with an insatiable appetite and passion for work. But shall a man work till the last when he can afford to do without it? I think, if he be wise, he will work till the last, or as long as he has mental and physical capacity for it. At all events, a diligent life in youth and on to the border of old age, is the life

that best befits a man who would quit himself like a man. You cannot find an idle day or an idle hour in the life of the Perfect Man, who said, ‘My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.’ He is a grand example of industry. We do not know that He ceased to work as a carpenter when He began to work as a preacher; the people did not say, ‘Was not this the carpenter?’ but, ‘Is not this the carpenter?’ as though He still wrought at His trade. But certainly, without that occupation, His time must have been very fully taken up in His work of teaching and in His works of healing. He did not always wait even until the Sabbath had come to an end, but on Sabbaths wrought many a work of kindness and compassion.

The man who is not in some sort a working man and a *hard-working* man, working hard at something good and useful (for men work very hard in things bad and injurious)—the man, I say, who is not in some sort a hard-working man, in that which is useful and good, is a disgrace to his species. There is unavoidable idleness often, through badness of trade and sometimes through want of health; but I speak only of wilful and unnecessary idleness, and I say that he who indulges in this wretched vice, does not quit himself like a man.

If we would quit ourselves like men, we must be sober men ; the word has a wide meaning, but I use it now as it is most commonly understood—sobriety, as opposed to drunkenness. Strange to say, there have been times when he who would quit himself like a man was expected to be a heavy drinker. It was considered manly to drink, and drink, and drink until the man could neither stand steadily, nor see clearly, nor talk coherently, nor think rationally. There are some still, in whom this wretched custom survives ; some, including some young men, who think it manly to be able to drink so much, who measure manliness by the number of glasses of beer or brandies and sodas that they consume. However, it is to be hoped that this most odious and insane perversion of terms is coming to an end ; that people do generally recognise the weakness and unmanliness of giving way to such temptation, of seeking consolation in intoxicating drink instead of bearing inevitable troubles with becoming fortitude. And yet here is this dire passion for strong drink making some people idiots, making some to commit murder, maddening some against their own wives and children, causing some to neglect every domestic duty, reducing very many to dependence upon charity and the poor-rates. Surely this line

of conduct, or anything approaching it, is utterly inconsistent with every right notion of what a man should be and do. I don't say that, in order to quit himself like a man, a man should be a total abstainer ; but I do hold that, in total abstinence, when such abstinence implies great self-denial, strong self-restraint, hard-won victory over temptation, there is a grand element of manliness.

In quitting ourselves like men, let us seek to be well-informed men. The intellect, if not the very noblest, is next to the very noblest part of human nature. I would place conscience, or the moral sense, above it, but it ranks next to that ; and therefore the cultivation of the intellect comes into the idea of quitting ourselves like men, of our being *quite* as men should be. To such culture, in all good and useful knowledge, the age we live in is eminently favourable. The opportunity of acquiring information is greater than it was in any previous period of the world's history. The educational advantages of our country, if still defective, have had many of their defects remedied ; the very numerous instances of high mental culture even under many difficulties, furnish a stimulating example, and knowledge is now more needful than it used to be as an instrument of secular progress.

Ignorance, by sheer force of diligence, often prospered in times gone by; but such prosperity is likely to become very rare, and ignorance is felt more and more to be a source of weakness.

And yet, notwithstanding these advantages on the one hand, and these warnings on the other, earnest and laborious and voluntary cultivation of the mind is not common. People are tempted by the amusing, the sensational, the superficial, the ephemeral in literature. I wonder how many young men there are here, young men of twenty say, who, since they left school, have bent their minds to even half a dozen great standard works of history, of science, of theology, and mastered them? If the mind be not the standard of the man, it is one standard of great value and importance; and in order to quit ourselves like men, we must make ourselves as wise and well-informed as we possibly can.

If we would quit ourselves like men, let us be patient men. It is not a manly thing to be grumbling continually, as some people do, about this, about that, about almost everything,—the weather, the state of trade, their health, their neighbours, and so forth. Now, whatever troubles us can or cannot be avoided. If it can be avoided, let it be avoided; if it cannot, let it be patiently

borne ; but let there be no peevishness. I think there is something worthy of respect, and even of admiration, in the idea of manliness entertained by many uncivilized peoples, that a man, worth calling a man, should be able to bear almost any amount of physical torture without a groan. Civilization has perhaps rendered that too hard a test for us, but we surely need not be so impatient of suffering, as to mourn and complain about trifling annoyances.

And patience includes the control of our temper under provocation. Anger is not strength, it is distinctly weakness ; it is a giving way to feelings which ought to be under perfect command ; and what is called strong language, language uttered under the influence of anger, is utterly misnamed. The strong language is the calm, cool, firm, passionless ‘yes’ or ‘no,’ and the strongest language is the soft answer that turneth away wrath. A man can scarcely yield to wrath, without afterwards feeling that he was weak in doing so, nor can a man vanquish his anger without a satisfactory consciousness of strength. And here the example of the Perfect Man shines forth gloriously, in that when He was reviled, He reviled not again, and when He suffered, threatened not. Had Jesus called down fire from heaven to destroy His

enemies, He would have shown Himself weak ; when He forgave them, loved them, prayed for them, blessed them, He showed his marvellous strength.

If we would quit ourselves like men, let us be generous men. How often does our speech bewray us ! What a shameful tale is told of human nature by that word *mean* ! What does it signify ? The etymologists tell us that it is identical with the word ‘many,’ the many, the majority. But how comes it to pass, that by mean and meanness, we understand selfishness, covetousness, stinginess, hardfistedness, and all that is small and contemptible ? The explanation of course is, that the many, the majority are of this character, and so the word ‘mean’ is branded with the stigma of utter baseness. Well, to be mean is, as the world’s history proves, to quit ourselves as men generally do. But to quit ourselves as we ought to, we must rise above this ‘mean,’ this average base majority—we must be generous, kind, open-handed, open-hearted, compassionate, unselfish, thinking quite as much of the good of others as of our own. And here, again, Jesus is seen quitting Himself like a man ; Jesus is seen as ‘quite’ the man, sympathizing, merciful, benevolent, giving the last drop of His life-blood in generous sacrifice for a sinful world.

To quit ourselves like men, we must not be misers, ‘screws,’ ‘skinflints;’ we must be faithful imitators of Him who always thought far more for others than for Himself.

If we would quit ourselves like men, let us be useful men. It is a very miserable and contemptible thing to live a useless life, pitying no one, helping no one, taking no part in any endeavour to make the world brighter and happier and better than it is. There are many powers, principles and practices that lead to the injury and ruin of mankind. And men who quit themselves as men should do, will not stand by with folded arms and in a spirit of indifference, beholding the horrid harm, temporal and spiritual, that these injurious and destructive influences are working in the bodies and souls of men, in their homes, in their families, in all their conditions.

Men who quit themselves as men, are moved with compassion, are stirred to action. They are neither unconcerned nor in a state of despair; they have some faith in truth, they have some faith in God; and, taking the whole armour of God, they go forth to fight against these workers of spiritual wickedness, these enemies and destroyers of man’s happiness. The Perfect Man, the man who was quite a man, went about doing

good; in His life, and in His death, this was His desire, this His endeavour, this His glorious achievement, and He has left us an example that we should follow His steps.

Finally, if we would quit ourselves like men, let us be godly men. Religiousness, as much as reason or intelligence, is an element of man's nature. It shows itself everywhere, except in cases of exceedingly gross barbarism, in which men have sunk to a condition very little superior to that of wild beasts. But every form of idolatry has borne testimony to the existence and to the strength of this principle in human nature. Of this principle men try to get rid by adopting atheism, and in some cases they succeed; but it is a poor success to banish from your mind and from your heart all belief in the Supreme Being, all sense of dependence upon Him, of trust in Him, of love to Him, all hope of a future life, yes, and many, if not all of the purest and strongest and best motives for conducting the present life wisely and nobly and in all respects well.

I trust that we shall never succeed in involving ourselves in such an awful loss as the loss of all belief in God and all reverence towards Him.

No, let this religious principle take its place along with reason and intelligence, and other

principles of our nature, and let it be duly cultivated under the guidance of reason and Scripture. Godly men, that is, God-like men. In this God-likeness we shall find the accomplishment of that grand purpose for which we were originally destined. In the image of God made He man, and the restoration and preservation of that image is the very crown and glory of man's nature. And here again, the Perfect Man is seen, the express image of God, quitting Himself like a man, being *quite* a man, just because He possessed in all its perfection that conformity with the image of God.

I might notice many other things that pertain to our acting in conformity with the brief but wonderfully comprehensive advice which Paul gives us in these four words, but time forbids. To sum up what I have said:—To quit ourselves like men, is to be *quite* men; is to be completely, altogether men. To quit ourselves like men, we must quit ourselves in a manner very differently from that in which most men quit themselves. To quit ourselves like men, we must consider not what most men do, but what all men ought to do; and the standard, pattern type of this, we have in the man Christ Jesus, and taking Him as our standard, pattern, type, leads us to quit ourselves like men, leads us to seek and strive to

be truthful, diligent, sober, well-informed, patient, generous, useful, godly.

My young friends, I entreat you to lay these matters to heart; to scorn and reject every false and pernicious idea of what forms a manly character and constitutes manly conduct. Men you are, or soon will be, if you live; but seek to be men indeed. Don't let the animalism of your nature crush and overpower the intellectual, the moral, the spiritual, so degrading you to the level of the beasts, without the beast's freedom from responsibility and blame.

Desire and strive to be a man *above* the mean man, superior to the average man, a credit and an honour to your species, fulfilling the high purpose of your creation; and, like to your grand Exemplar, sons of man, but also sons of God. *See 5. pgs*

meio-sis

5. pgs

II.

‘PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD, O ISRAEL.’

AMOS iv. 12.

THE prophet Amos fulfilled his course in the eighth century before the birth of Christ, and some time before the Assyrians destroyed the kingdom of the Ten Tribes. He belonged to the neighbouring kingdom of Judah, but he was sent by the word of the Lord to warn the kingdom of Israel of the doom that was approaching. That kingdom was then at the height of its power and prosperity. The conquests effected by the second Jeroboam had enlarged its territory, increased its wealth, and encouraged its people to believe that they could hold their own against any nation that might venture to invade them. They thought themselves perfectly secure, and in that fancied security gave themselves up to every kind of wickedness. The prophet has much to say concerning the people’s sins ; but it is worthy of notice, that while their idolatry, which was the chief root of all their

iniquities, is sternly rebuked, quite as much is said concerning the oppression, the dishonesty, the drunkenness, and the licentiousness that universally prevailed. The prophet is quite as seriously concerned for the interests of morality as for those of religion; or, to state it more correctly, God regarded the people's sins against themselves and against each other with quite as much displeasure as their sins against Himself.

God had been very patient with them. Instead of casting them off when they cast Him off—as they did in worshipping the golden calves which Jeroboam set up at Dan and Bethel,—instead of casting them off, as in all righteousness He might have done, the God of their fathers was still their God. He sent to them prophet after prophet, and prophets of no mean order, for Elijah was one of them, and Elisha another. He warned them, He entreated them, He chastened them with judgments, He restored them to peace and plenty; but all to no purpose. The people were fulfilling Solomon's proverb, 'He that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.' So now God would no longer endure their abominable wickedness, and Amos was sent to tell them that their destruction was at hand, and that, as they had

refused to meet their God in repentance and obedience, that as they had refused to meet Him in His repeated offers of forgiveness, they must now meet Him in a terrible judgment which should scatter them through the world.

And yet the message is delivered in terms which still hold out hope, in terms which show that the people might still so meet God as to be accepted of Him; for after this warning, 'Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel,' we read in the next chapter (chap. v. 4), 'For thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, Seek ye Me, and ye shall live.' And again (chap. v. 14, 15), 'Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.' But even these words of grace and encouragement were of no avail. The people set God at defiance, and had to meet Him in judgment when He sent the Assyrians against them, and they were taken captive and ceased from being a nation.

Such is what we may call the history of our text. It bears no reference to death and judgment after death: it is simply a warning of the destruction that was about to befall the kingdom of Israel.

But it is only natural that words so striking and so solemn should impress themselves upon the mind and conscience of every one who reads them, and that each should take them as a message from God to himself. We therefore leave the historical explanation of the text, but we have not done with it: we must consider it in its application to ourselves. 'Prepare to meet thy God!' Whoever thou art, old or young, rich or poor, good or bad, 'Prepare to meet thy God!'

The words taken in their general and not merely historical signification, are commonly used to warn men of the fact, that they must meet God in the judgment to come. It is natural and right that the words should be applied in this manner. The reasonableness, I think we may say the necessity and the certainty of such judgment, can hardly be disputed by any who acknowledge the existence of a God, and the principle of man's responsibility to God.

In this world neither vice nor virtue meets with its due reward; in many cases the worst men suffer least, and the best men most. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus represents no singular case, it is rather an illustration of the rule than of the exception. The greatest criminals are the most secure from punishment. Some poor starving wretch filches a purse and is sent to prison; but a

king may destroy ten thousand lives, and reduce a whole country to desolation, and oppress millions of his fellow-men, and yet be admired and almost adored as a hero.

It is to little purpose that dramatists, novelists, and poets so often represent retribution as falling upon the wrong-doer and vindicating the innocent. Such representations utter what we feel ought to be rather than what is, ~~and~~ they are confounded and contradicted by the hard facts of history and of everyday life, which show that wrong, ~~wrong of the worst sort~~, is often triumphant to the last; ~~and~~ that the sinner is often spared, not only everything in the form of outward calamity, but ~~also~~ even the uneasiness of a guilty conscience ~~and~~ the more we think of these ~~wrong~~ inequalities and injustices that are never in this world rectified, ~~and squared~~ the more does our moral sense cry out for a judgment to come.

And in accordance with this conviction, the Bible has much to say concerning such a final adjustment. Even the Psalmist, who lived so long before the Christian era, again and again speaks of God as coming to judge the world in righteousness and equity. Solomon closes his Book of Ecclesiastes with these memorable words, 'For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing,

whether it be good, or whether it be evil.' The judgment and the day of judgment are often spoken of by our Saviour, and among His sayings on this subject is this, 'For every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account in the day of judgment.' The parables of the talents and the pounds are figurative discourses upon the same subject, setting forth the principles upon which the judgment shall be conducted. The Epistles contain many allusions to it, as for instance, 'It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.'

Perhaps the most remarkable disclosure made by the New Testament in regard to that judgment is this,—that Christ Himself will be the Judge. Our Lord Himself declares this. 'The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son' (John v. 22). Jesus also sets this forth more extensively when he says in Matt. xxv. 31, 32, 'When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats ~~and soon~~. Paul says, 'We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ' (2 Cor. v. 10); and again (Rom. xiv. 10), 'We shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.'

This appointment of our Saviour to be our Judge is worthy of our deep consideration. God would seem hereby to assure us of a judgment in which our Judge will be one not ignorant of our infirmities, nor indisposed to look upon them leniently. We certainly can feel confident that, having Christ to judge us, we shall not be judged in a hard and exacting spirit ; we feel certain that our Judge will be much more willing to pardon than to condemn. I should think that every one who knows the character of Christ would be willing to say, ‘If I am to be judged, let me be judged by Him who said to one sinner, “Thy sins be forgiven thee ;” to another, “Go and sin no more ;” and to another, “This day shalt thou be with Me in paradise.”’ Yet, let us remember that while Jesus is gracious, He is also just. Let us not forget the sternness with which He rebuked sin. ‘We believe that He shall come to be our Judge,’ but He will judge the world in righteousness no less than in mercy. The fact that He is to be our Judge may fill us with hope, but can never justify presumption.

When men read this text in the Bible, or hear it preached upon in the pulpit, it is to that great future judgment, to the meeting with their God there, that their thoughts are generally directed. They suppose that the preparation commanded

by these words, 'Prepare to meet thy God,' is preparation for that. I do not say that such a reading of the text in its application to us is erroneous. Be it so, that what we are commanded to prepare for is the meeting with God, the meeting with Christ who is God, in the great final judgment.

— But this reading of the verse, while not in itself incorrect, leads to many errors and mistakes. 'I shall have to meet my God there after death; but death is still a great way off, and I need not now prepare.' And so men quietly live on unprepared, and knowing that they are unprepared, presuming upon the chance of continued life, intending, when once they have reason to believe that their end is near,—intending then to prepare. They may be suddenly cut off without a moment's preparation; the pains and anxieties of sickness may render them quite incapable of preparation, ~~in the hope of recovery, or in despair of recovery,~~ preparation is neglected. Possibly, when just at their last gasp, they receive the sacrament by way of preparation. Perhaps there are a few honest death-bed preparations; the genuineness of such, however, never can be proved, but is indeed extremely doubtful, because, in most cases, when, contrary to expectation, the sick man recovers, he lives just as he lived

before Altogether this sick-bed preparation to meet God is a poor, unsatisfactory, often superstitious, and in some sense contemptible affair, in which no confidence can be placed. It is generally to very little purpose that men in the hour of death prepare to meet their God, when they have not in life prepared to meet Him. I am far from saying that such death-bed preparation is never sincere, or never accepted of God, but I do say that it is incapable of proof and verification. We cannot tell that any man is in a fit state to meet his God unless his life give evidence of conversion. And surely preparation to meet our God is too serious and important a matter to be risked upon the thousand chances of our last hours, and our capacity in those hours to make any preparation whatever. The fact is, that men make a great and miserable mistake in supposing that the only meeting with God for which they are to prepare, and indeed the only meeting with God that is possible, is that compulsory meeting with Him in the day of judgment.

In a manner equally irrational and unscriptural, God is represented as at a great distance, seated on a throne in the highest heavens, entirely separate and apart from us now, but proposing at some future time to come and arraign us before His bar, that we may give account of ourselves to Him, and

that our only meeting with Him will be on that occasion. Now let us remember God's omnipresence. 'In Him we live and move and have our being.' 'Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me. Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit ? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence ?' If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there ; if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea ; even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me.'

Instead of having to meet God only at the day of judgment, we meet Him every day, or at any rate He meets us. We read that Enoch walked with God in this world for hundreds of years,—there is something like the true idea of meeting with God. And remember the words of Jesus : 'If a man love Me, he will keep My words : and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with Him' (John xiv. 23). And again : 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock : if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me' (Rev. iii. 20).

To meet with God is not the terror of the future ;

it is the privilege, the blessing of the present. A Christian man who really understands what his religion is, and proves it by experience, will say, ~~can~~ say with truth and with thankfulness, 'I meet my God every day of my life ; in prayer I speak to Him as a man speaketh to his friend. To me He is not a God afar off, whom some day I must meet in judgment ; He is near me, ~~He is with me~~, He holds me by the hand, and leads me ~~and guides me~~. His Spirit holds fellowship with my spirit in holy thoughts : ~~No~~ one is so near to me as He, so constantly with me as He. You need not tell me to prepare to meet Him. I met with Him long ago, and have been with Him ever since ; and meeting Him here so much as my Friend, I am perfectly prepared to meet Him hereafter as my Judge. ~~I have no preparation to make, — none whatever.~~ I have not the slightest fear in regard to the judgment, — not because I consider myself perfect. I know that I have often sinned, ~~and never spent a day altogether without sin~~ ; but when I met with Him, ~~and when in His grace He met with me,~~ and came near to me, ~~so near as to breathe~~ His Spirit into me, He convinced me of my sin, but also convinced me of His willingness to forgive it, and impressed upon my mind the glorious truth, that His dear Son died to make atonement for my

sin, and to make peace for me with Him. And so I asked Him to forgive me for Christ's sake ; I asked Him to receive me as His child ; I asked Him to remain with me to guide and help me. And He ^{heard} received my prayer. We met, and met never to part, for He has said, and said to me, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee !"

Such, my friends, is the meeting with God which I would most earnestly counsel,—the meeting with God now. It is really a very simple and easy matter : God has ordained prayer as the means whereby we may meet with Him. 'To this man will I look, and with him will I dwell, even with him who is of a humble and of a contrite spirit.' Meet God in prayer. And do not think in meeting Him to mention this or that good work which you have done. He does not desire that, does not wish you either to prove yourself righteous, or to show that there is this or that excuse to be pleaded for what evil you have done. The first sacrifice to bring to God is the sacrifice of a broken heart, the frank and full confession of utter sinfulness and worthlessness. And to this confession add the prayer that, for Christ's sake, you may be forgiven. Remembering what Christ has done to take away sin, remembering that what He did was done in obedience to the Father's will, plead that, and that

~~only, when you ask to be forgiven.~~ And ask for the inclination and the power to forsake sin, and to live a holy life.

And then keep up this communion with God. Meet Him in prayer day by day. Go to Him in prayer with every temptation, every difficulty, every sorrow, every duty, and every sin. ~~And thus acquaint yourself with God, and be at peace, as the Scripture says.~~ Regard Him with reverence and godly fear; yet regard Him also with the familiarity with which you regard a friend, for though He be so high, yet hath He respect unto ~~the lowly.~~ So meet with Him, and such divine companionship of thought, and feeling, and will, and purpose, will be an infinite blessing to you; it will keep you out of sin, it will render you joyful all your days, it will give you a confidence in Him which nothing can disturb. Meeting with God, and walking with God, your whole character will be ennobled; and beholding so constantly ~~in your contemplations and communion,~~ beholding so constantly the glory of the Lord, you will be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord. ~~And it will become the chief joy of every day's existence that day by day you meet your God.~~

Now this is the way in which we should prepare

to meet our God in the day of judgment. So, meeting ~~Him~~ in life, we need have no anxiety about meeting Him after death. Having met with Him and walked with Him, having been, through repentance and faith, forgiven and justified, having, through fellowship with His Spirit, been sanctified, having so lived on earth as to please Him, we can meet Him in the judgment with assurance and joy ~~and although what we have to offer in the form of~~ ~~obedience and good works may be hardly worthy of His acceptance, yet He will accept it, and reward it too.~~ We shall meet with Him then to know Him better than we can know Him now; we shall meet Him, so changed by a glorious resurrection, as to be able to see Him; we shall meet Him prepared for whatever service He may ordain for us in His perfected kingdom, for we shall so have learned to serve Him here as to serve ^{His} Him better hereafter.

My dear friends, I know ~~of~~ ^{there is} no other way of preparing to meet our God than this,—repentance, faith, obedience. ~~Not a hurried, panic-stricken preparation in a dying hour after a life of ungodliness, carelessness, worldliness, and selfishness;~~ but the preparation that results from a personal ~~and experimental~~ knowledge of God, in a life consecrated to His service, and lived in consciousness of His presence, and in the desire to please Him.

And it is not because death may be very near that I say, prepare to meet your God. I should say this, with equal earnestness and urgency, if I knew that every one of us had twenty years of life yet to live in this world. What I wish is, that we should all meet our God now, in the way which I have endeavoured to explain. For He is waiting to meet us, to meet every one of us; and such a meeting, followed up by constant fellowship with Him, would be of such infinite advantage to us all. Such a source of comfort, of guidance, of help, of safety, of true progress, and of preparation not for judgment only, but for the eternal life beyond.

Some of ~~you~~ ^{us} ~~are~~ ^{may be} unprepared to meet ~~your~~ God, and ~~you~~ ^{we} know that ~~you~~ are unprepared. ~~You~~ ^{We} have not repented of sin, ~~you~~ have not believed on Jesus Christ, ~~you~~ have not been forgiven, ~~your~~ unpardoned guilt is upon ~~your~~ souls. ~~You~~ ^{We} may at any moment be surprised by the sudden approach of death. ~~I~~ ^{We} would beseech of ~~you~~ not to deceive yourselves with the thought that ~~you~~ can make preparation then: ~~you~~ cannot then make such preparation as shall be satisfactory and trustworthy. ~~No~~, ^{at} the best, it will be a preparation, ~~as I have said~~, unproved, and such as cannot be verified. God is merciful, but God is just; and whether, merciful as He is, you can expect Him, after you have thousands of times

rejected His message of mercy and sinned as long as you could sin,—whether you can expect that then, when you are terrified by the fear of death and not at all converted from your sin, He will be gracious to you,—whether it is reasonable to expect this, I leave you to judge; but to me it appears to be a great and dreadful hazard.

And why stake your eternal salvation upon a mere peradventure at the last, when now you can establish it indeed and of a truth, by meeting your God at once, and without a day's or an hour's delay, —going to Him in humble, penitent, and believing prayer? Let this be your resolve, if you are still living an unbelieving, sinful life,—‘I will go and meet my God now: this very night I will seek Him at the throne of grace, with the preparation of a humble and penitent heart. So I will meet Him and so abide with Him; and then, let death come when it may and how it may, I shall be prepared to meet, as my Judge, Him whom I shall have met and walked with as my Friend and my Redeemer. Yes, I will meet Him now, and have this great and awful question of judgment to come settled at once and for ever, by asking and obtaining a full forgiveness beforehand, so that when the judgment comes, it will be found that by faith I am in Christ Jesus, and that therefore to me there is no condemnation.’

III.

THE GLORY OF FORGIVENESS.

‘The discretion of a man deferreth his anger ; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.’—PROV. xix. 11.

UNLESS I am greatly mistaken, which I readily allow is very possible, the two divisions of this sentence, instead of being placed in apposition, as they are by the use of the word *and*, ought to be placed in strong opposition by means of the word *but*. ‘The discretion of a man deferreth his anger ; but it is his glory to pass over a transgression.’ Let us consider each of these statements.

I. And first, ‘the discretion of a man deferreth his anger.’ Discretion is, strictly speaking, not a moral but an intellectual power. It is simply discernment ; discernment and discretion are radically the same word, though cast into different forms. Discernment, ability to distinguish between things, to distinguish between the pleasant and the dis-

agreeable, between the prudent and the inexpedient, between the gainful and the unprofitable, between the good and the evil. A discreet man is a man who sees what is to his own interest, and acts accordingly. A man's discretion leads him to discern the men whom he may trust, as distinct from the men whom it is not safe to trust. A man's discretion discerns whether he should lend a man a thousand pounds or refuse to lend him a shilling. A man's discretion teaches him in what enterprises it were prudent to invest his money, and in what others this money would probably be endangered or lost. A man's discretion tells him to regulate his expenditure in proportion to his income. A man's discretion tells him when to speak, and when to hold his peace; what to observe, and what to shut his eyes against. A man's discretion is undoubtedly of immense service to him in the conduct of life; and if a man have little or no discretion, he comes off very badly, he makes many blunders, sustains many losses, gets into many troubles, which a discreet man entirely escapes. The man endowed with discretion may be in all other respects very inferior to his neighbour, who is not blessed with this great practical gift, and yet he will get on where the other will dismally fail. I should say that discretion is the

main secret of secular success. Genius will starve where discretion will amass millions.

But discretion can do some very questionable things. It can lead a man to take advantage of his neighbour's ignorance, of his neighbour's weakness, of his neighbour's poverty. It can tell lies upon occasion, and act the hypocrite to perfection. It is great in concealing facts ; in telling so much truth as will serve its turn, and cunningly keeping back what might tell against it. The discretion of a man will, in selling overvalue, and in buying undervalue, the articles of merchandise. Discretion is not a very noble property,—at any rate it can be put to the very meanest and vilest uses, as we see in the case of the Jesuits, for there never was in all the world a class of men more discreet than that Order.

And in the text Solomon points out one of the vile uses of discretion. ‘The discretion of a man deferreth his anger.’ This is not a man who quenches and extinguishes his anger, who foregoes every revengeful purpose ; but a man who merely defers it, according to the proverb, ‘Wait time and place to seek thy revenge, for it is never well done in a hurry ;’ so he defers it. It would not be prudent to blurt it out in an immediate fierce storm of rebuke, or in an instant infliction of

punishment. ‘Perhaps it is not possible just now to have the much coveted revenge; a better opportunity may occur: the man who has wronged me may one day commit himself and be in my power: I will wait, week after week, year after year; but I will nurse my anger till the right time comes, and then the revenge will be ample and sweet!’

Thus a man’s discretion nurses many old grudges, keeps them quiet, waits and watches for the right occasion;—and a detestable office it is which it thus performs. Sometimes, indeed often, the anger deferred dies away, and discretion so far does a good thing in deferring the anger; but small thanks to discretion for that, because its purpose, as Solomon implies, is to cherish the anger, and its only objection to the immediate exhibition and utterance of the anger is, that it would be imprudent and unsafe, and not as triumphant as it might be at some future time. Thus ‘the discretion of a man deferreth his anger,’ just as it might defer the sale of a property in the hope of some time getting a larger price for it.

The discretion of the man deferred Esau’s anger when he said, ‘The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob.’ In that case, certainly, the anger which discretion deferred, good nature, having time given to it,

conquered. The discretion of the man deferred Solomon's anger, when he spared the wretched Shimei, who had cursed his father David ; but in this case the anger was deferred only till Solomon could find an excuse for cutting off his head. Yes, 'the discretion of a man deferreth his anger,' and sometimes renders it more fell and foul than if it had found immediate expression. So much for discretion with its cunning and its craft, and its long-deferred anger and revenge.

II. Let us turn to a better and more pleasant theme. 'It is his glory to pass over a transgression.' It is gratifying to find such words as these in a part of Scripture that was written a thousand years before Christ came to teach us, in all its perfection, the duty and the glory of forgiveness. What Solomon here says was certainly not the sentiment of his age. It is terrible to find, among David's last words to Solomon, a charge, a command, to bring down to the grave with blood the hoary head, not only of Shimei, who had cursed him, but also that of Joab, who had very faithfully served him. A regular mixture of kindness and cruelty, of leniency and ferocity, of forgiveness and revenge, was David ; so magnanimous in his treatment of Saul, so implacable in regard to the brave

captain of his own host, who was moreover his own nephew. No, it was not the rule to pass over a transgression; it was not David's rule, it was not Solomon's rule, however highly he chooses to speak of it in this and in some other of his proverbs;—as when he says, 'If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink.' The rule was, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, blood for blood, life for life.

'His glory to pass over a transgression'! Nay, it was considered a man's glory to take a full revenge; and while it was a disgrace for a man not to take a full revenge for injuries done to himself, it was still more disgraceful not to take revenge for wrongs done to his ancestors; every such wrong was handed down as an heirloom. In many cases among savage tribes, and among people not altogether savage, but so far civilized as the Highland clans were, the chief inheritance that in many cases accrued to the head of the tribe was a multitude of such unavenged wrongs. A barren rock, a ruined castle, and a quarrel with the neighbouring Macleans or Macdonalds, that was all that the heir of the chieftain had for his position. 'His glory to pass over a transgression'! Say rather, that to pass it over had been his burning and everlasting shame.

But the words of Solomon, strengthened greatly by the words of One infinitely greater than he, have gradually made their way to the minds and hearts of cultivated men; and it is by all such seen and felt that it is a man's 'glory to pass over a transgression,' and that vindictiveness is wrong and disgraceful, especially if deferred by the discretion of a man. God be thanked for such a change in men's convictions on this subject, and that a man can now pass by a transgression without being branded as a sneak and a coward. But still we haggle about this matter.

We can take Solomon's words which speak of but one transgression, and do not refer to its character, and there are some transgressions which we can and do pass by, perhaps, readily enough. But when we come to our Saviour's much stronger statements upon the subject, we pause, we argue, we try to find excuses, to place limitations, and we flatly declare that there are transgressions which we cannot pass over, which we will not and cannot forgive. 'Until seventy times seven'! That staggers us, for, with Peter, we think that seven times are in all conscience quite enough.

And then the nature of the transgression so tries our forgiving disposition. Seventy times seven if you will, provided the transgressions are paltry.

Seventy times seven stupid mistakes on the part of a servant ; seventy times seven acts of forgetfulness on the part of a friend ; but not seventy times seven repetitions of wilful deception, not seventy times seven deliberate insults.

‘It is his glory to pass over a transgression’ ! Well, where shall we place the limit ? The more numerous and the more heinous the transgressions, I should think the greater would be the glory of passing them by, and his must surely be the greatest glory who passes by the greatest number of the greatest transgressions. Well, not to press this question of limits, for none of us can stand its being pressed very far, it is something if we feel that there is a moral glory in a forgiving spirit. I hope we do feel this, and feel that, however limited may be our power to forgive, it is a glorious thing to do, and glorious in proportion to the amount of transgression that is forgiven. It is to a man’s glory to be wise, it is to a man’s glory to be strong, it is to a man’s glory to be just, it is to a man’s glory to be kind ; but above all, it is glorious to be forgiving, to be kind in passing over transgressions.

Nay more ; not only do we feel that it is a man’s glory to pass over transgressions, we feel this so strongly that we regard it as a discreditable, shameful, cruel thing if he do not manifest a

forgiving spirit. A man who is extreme to mark what is done amiss, who is relentless in his anger, and visits with punishment every offence, is a man whom we cannot endure. I remember with what scorn and abhorrence I looked upon a hard, tyrannical man, who told me that it was the inexorable rule in his factory instantly to discharge any person who ventured to utter the slightest complaint about anything in the conduct of the concern. Willingness to pass over a transgression, and to pass over a great many transgressions, is what we look for in any man who expects not to be shrunk from as a monster of unkindness. It certainly is not more our glory to pass over a transgression, than it is our shame not to pass it over.

Now, these principles admitted, let us see how they stand related to God's glory. If it be in an especial sense the glory of a man to pass over a transgression, shall not this be regarded as in an especial sense the glory of God also? Whatever may be said of His glory as seen in His creation, and as proved in His righteousness and in His grand benevolence, He is not to our mind an altogether glorious God, unless it be His nature and property ever to have mercy and to forgive. The heavens declare His glory, and the earth declares

His glory. I see His glory also in His law, so holy, and just, and good ; but I must also see His glory in that which corresponds with man's chief glory, in His passing over transgression. Nothing purporting to be a revelation of the divine character and will would be worthy of acceptance, or could be regarded as true, if it did not reveal a God who glories in passing over the transgressions of His creatures. Will He be behind us, will He be unequal to us, in this any more than in other respects ? Infinitely excelling us in wisdom and in power, shall a man of a forgiving spirit put Him to shame by being kinder than He to those who trespass against Him ? Surely we have reason to expect, to believe, to feel confident, that the seventy times seven which is man's glory, is far surpassed in the glory of God's forgiving grace.

How comes it to pass, then, that men have formed such horrible ideas of God, as to be hardly able to believe that He will at all pass over transgression ? Such a God, so hard, so exacting, so relentless, so vindictive, is worthy of savages, who think it their glory to avenge every wrong and punish all who injure them. But, unhappily, this inhuman idea of the Divine Being is not confined to savages ; it is held by many Christians who ascribe to Him such a relentless and vindictive spirit that, while

they maintain it is to a man's glory to pass over many transgressions, one might think that they considered it God's glory to punish, and punish with infinite severity, every transgression. Conduct which in themselves they would consider diabolical, they seem to think God quite capable of. They are astonished to think that God should forgive sin, they can hardly believe it! Is such incredulity, is such amazement, at all to God's praise? How any one can think that, while it is his glory to pass over a transgression, it is God's glory, instead of passing by transgression, to consign to eternal torture the greater portion of mankind, including, as some of these savage creeds do, little children, condemned and tortured in eternal fire for the sin of Adam, is more than I can understand. If this be orthodoxy, I do not know any atheism that is half so bad. No, no; if it be our glory to pass over a transgression, it is, it must be God's glory too.

'His glory to pass over a transgression.' And so we find it. He does pass transgression over. Thus He proclaims His name: 'And the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin' (Ex. xxxiv. 6, 7). And thus

He calls to us: ‘Come now and let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool’ (*Isa. i. 18*). And thus He says, and not only says but swears: ‘As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live’ (*Ezek. xxxiii. 11*). Thus He gave assurance of His willingness to pass over transgression, speaking by His prophets. And what are the later declarations of His will? Paul tells us that ‘He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance;’ and that ‘He will have all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.’ And John says, ‘God is love;’ and certainly, if God be love, He must be a God who glories in passing over transgressions. There can be no number of transgressions the passing over of which is not guaranteed by the fact that God is love.

But it may be objected that the doctrine of the atonement is at variance with this principle of God’s willingness to pass over transgression. He will forgive, but He would not forgive excepting on the extraordinary and hard, if not cruel, condition, that Christ should suffer: that an innocent person should die an accursed death. Forgiveness

granted only on such a condition is surely kindness to us at the cost of cruelty to Jesus! Now, if Jesus be not God, there is force, there is great force in this objection to the doctrine of God's willingness to forgive. But if we are to take the Scriptures for our guide, there is clear and ample testimony to the fact that Jesus Christ is God,—God manifest in the flesh. The apostles called Him their Lord and their God. ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.’ And this being so, what is the atonement? What is the mystery of the cross? It is God Himself in Christ suffering in order that our sins might in righteousness, as well as in love, be forgiven.

Now if the passing over of a transgression be a man's glory, it is in an especial sense and degree his glory when, in passing over such transgression, he is himself a sufferer. The transgression that does me no perceptible injury, I may very easily pass over; but when the transgression is, for example, that a man has, wilfully and through deliberate fraud, got into my debt for a large amount, and in passing over his transgression I have to endure a heavy loss, then I think I may claim a peculiar glory for my kindness to such a man. In other words, the glory of passing over

a transgression is proportionate to the suffering which the passing over it involves. And if in the interest and for the honour of His righteousness, God, in passing over our transgressions, submitted to the shame and suffering of the cross, all the more is it to His glory.

If I had an enemy who had greatly injured me, and I, seeing him in peril, should risk and lose my life to save him, I think you would call that the perfection of glory in this matter of forgiveness. Such conduct is conceivable: I think that David would have laid down his life, not only for Jonathan, but for Saul. And since forgiveness at the cost of suffering is the very perfection of forgiveness, I will go so far as to say that, without the atonement, and apart from God in Christ suffering to save His enemies, I cannot find the perfection of forgiveness in Him. This then I say with all sincerity, that the doctrine of the atonement, which means the forgiveness of sins through the sufferings of Christ,—Christ being God manifest in the flesh,—does not detract from the glory of God in forgiving our transgressions. On the contrary, it greatly adds to His glory. A forgiveness that costs the forgiver little or nothing, is not to be compared with a forgiveness the granting of which costs such suffering as the suffering of the cross.

Apart from the atonement, I think that many an act of forgiveness done by man would surpass in glory God's forgiveness of our transgressions. Apart from the atonement, I do not know but that many a man, suffering rather than that his enemy should, would be more glorious than God in the forgiveness of the whole world. And the atonement seems to my mind morally necessary to the perfection of the divine glory in passing over our transgressions. And instead of cavilling at the atonement, as if it indicated on God's part a want of entire readiness and heartiness in the forgiveness of men, let us rather learn from it the kind of forgiveness that is of all others the most glorious,—the forgiveness that costs us much in self-denial and in suffering. God in Christ forgiving sinners, forgiving us through the awful sufferings of Calvary, is the grand example for us all in passing over the transgressions that may be committed against us.

We are taught to pray, ‘Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us;’ and so let us pray. Yet perhaps we may venture also to transpose the words, and ask that God would teach us to forgive those who trespass against us, as He forgives our trespasses against Him; counting no cost so large as to make our forgiveness of our neighbour, of our enemy,

impossible. It is glorious to pass over a transgression, but the glory increases and becomes brighter and brighter with every loss, with every suffering that the forgiveness costs, until it reaches a climax that can never be excelled, in the passing over of the whole world's transgressions, at the infinite cost of what was done and suffered when God in Christ wrought out our redemption on the cross.

IV.

RATIONALISM.

'Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.'—
I PETER iii. 15.

RATIONALISM is a word commonly employed to describe an attitude of the mind, adverse to religion, and especially adverse to the belief in Christianity. Now this seems to me incorrect and unfair. When a man says that he is a rationalist, he by implication charges with irrational conduct those from whom he differs. It is a word, therefore, which gives great ground of offence to believers in Christ and in the Word of God. It indirectly says, that all such people are fools,—*all* such, however learned, however good, however useful,—*all* are fools, thinking, speaking, acting after an irrational manner.

Now Christianity claims to be a rational religion. It sprang from the most rational, perhaps one might say the only rational religion of the old world, the religion that protested against poly-

theism and idolatry, that taught men to believe in one God, and not to worship the hosts of heaven, nor to deify the forces of nature, nor to bow down to images graven by art and man's device. The Israelites, so far as they were faithful to their religion, were the rationalists of their time, and I say that Christianity claims to be a rational religion. This claim is distinctly made for it by Peter in our text, and as distinctly by Paul, when he speaks of the Christian's presenting himself to God a living sacrifice as a reasonable service. If by a rationalist I am to understand one who uses his reason in dealing with religious questions, there surely was rationalism in what Christ said to the Samaritan woman about the worship of God, as not restricted to any particular place ; rationalism in what He said to the scribes and Pharisees concerning their foolish traditions and their merely formal profession of holiness ; and taking the whole of Christ's teaching as recorded in the Gospels, I think we can truthfully say of it, that while it contains much that is above our comprehension, and much that we may think hard in the way of precept, still it is a teaching distinguished by its reasonableness. If it were not so, it never could have commanded such respect, deference, approval, obedience as it has done.

The Reformers were, to a remarkable extent, rationalists. They found Christianity so corrupted in doctrine, in morals, in ritual, as to have become almost an irrational religion. Against such corruptions they uttered their protest, and argued the whole case in a highly rational manner. It may be said that they based all their arguments upon Scripture ; this, however, is scarcely true, for in very many instances they appealed directly to the reason of men, apart from scriptural authority. But when they rested their case upon Scripture, they had their reasons for doing so, their reasons for believing that the Scripture was a trustworthy guide. Their reasons for such belief would not satisfy the modern rationalist ; but still their reasons were reasons, they were not illogical absurdities. The Reformers were the rationalists of their age ; they did much towards substituting a sober and reverential reason for blind submission to ecclesiastical authority ; and the most advanced, and daring, and impious rationalist of the present time is not looked upon with stronger disapproval and deeper horror than was felt by religious people with regard to such men as Wycliffe and Luther. They were, in the providence of God, the saviours of Christianity, but they were denounced and persecuted in the belief that they were its destroyers.

Now, looking at rationalism as the application of reason to the investigation of religion, what has it done? It seems to me to have done some good. One of the first good things it did, was to demand, agitate for, and secure the right of all men to possess and read the Scriptures. But for the rationalism of those bygone times, this would not have been conceded. The cry of the Church was, ‘With the gospel a man becomes a heretic; don’t let him have the gospel then!’ But rationalism, that is, *reason*, persisted and prevailed, and the Scriptures were translated into the language spoken by the people. The English Bible, if not the gift of rationalism to the English people, is certainly a gift which, but for the intelligent and courageous spirit of rationalism, would never have been given, would never have existed. The same spirit has done much towards the destruction of belief in many degrading superstitions. Religion some few centuries ago had fallen into such hands as disabled it from coping with superstition; it was frequently invoked in aid of superstition, and men’s minds were filled with groundless fears, which it was to the interest of priests to preserve and to intensify, because, under the pressure of such fears, men were ready to give up all they had to those who professed to have the power to avert the calamities, temporal

and eternal, which were supposed to be impending. And with these superstitions there was much ignorance and cruelty.

The belief in witchcraft was foolish, but it was worse than foolish : it led to the unjust condemnation and horribly cruel death of great multitudes of ignorant and deluded people, chiefly women, who perhaps supposed themselves to be able to exert mysterious and evil influence on their neighbours ; and who, at any rate, were considered to be in league and covenant with Satan for the injury of society. Rationalism succeeded at last in overturning that degrading belief, notwithstanding the protest of theologians and preachers profiting thereby, who declared that to give up witchcraft was to give up the Bible. Rationalism prevailing over that monstrous error, persecution for witchcraft came to an end ; for aught we can see to the contrary, it might have been going on still but for rationalism.

But we owe to rationalism the cessation of all persecution for religious opinions and practices. If ecclesiastics would not see the unscripturalness of it, society saw its unreasonableness, and thus the rationalist spirit gave us first toleration and then full religious freedom.

The spirit of rationalism being largely of a

practical and utilitarian character, has done much to bring to the front the ethics of Christianity, to make less of religious dogma, and more of religious conduct. There have been times when conduct counted for little, but orthodoxy in creed was everything. To hold, or to profess to hold, at the bidding of the Church, certain mysterious and incomprehensible ideas of the nature of God, and the mutual relations of the Trinity, that was the main thing; and holding such belief, though a man might live like a beast, he was safe. Rationalism has taught men to be less positive and dogmatic in regard to the unseen, the infinite, the unknowable, and has turned the current of religious thought and feeling and life more into the channel of moral and spiritual utility. It has given to good character and good works a more prominent position than was accorded to them in times past, and yet, I think, not a more prominent position than they have in Scripture. And certainly, with all the fears that are felt and expressed lest rationalism should prove the destruction of Christianity, everything that pertains to practical Christianity was never, since the days of the apostles, more healthy, more active than now, in the midst of all this extensive and extending rationalism.

But even the fiercest, and perhaps most formidable, assaults that rationalism has made upon Christian doctrine have done good in this way. They have set thoughtful Christian men to do what our text calls upon all Christians to do ; they have compelled them to consider and to set forth the reason or reasons they have for the hope that is in them, though the conclusiveness of replies which have been made to rationalistic doubts and objections may be questioned by not a few ; still in these replies there is much that explains, defines, and confirms what Christians believe. The controversy with rationalism has proved, that far more can be said for every important principle of Christianity than was supposed before this controversy came up ; more reasons and better reasons for the hope that is in us have been among the results of the assaults of rationalism.

I am very far from saying that rationalism has done no harm. I fear it has done very great harm ; it has affected very many minds with much painful, much agonizing doubt ; it has wrenched from many their Christian faith and hope. It has caused not a few Christian parents anxiety, disappointment, and sorrow, when they have seen that under its influence their children, as they grew up, have become indifferent to religion, and treated it with

scoffing and contempt. If rationalism have brought into prominence the practical, useful, beneficent characteristics of Christianity, it has, on the other hand, acting on less worthy minds, made men proud and vain and impious, and, in regard to all beneficent work, indifferent, sceptical, cold, and dead. It has in many instances enlightened the intellect at the terrible cost of stunting the affections ; it has given men broader views, but has in proportion narrowed their sympathies ; it has fed their minds, but starved their hearts.

I have made large admissions in regard to the splendid achievements of rationalism, in delivering the mind from deadness and error, and in establishing justice and freedom. But whatever be its successes, it has its failures, and very grievous failures. It fails in respect to unity. There are rationalists and rationalists. The name does not indicate just one clearly defined class or sect. If there be anything in the argument against Christianity, on the ground of diversity of opinion held by its professors, the same objection may be urged against rationalism. It fails, too, in this respect, that it does not furnish clear and definite rules for the conduct of life. Abandoning, as it virtually does, the moral teaching of the Scriptures, it can only leave men to the suggestions of con-

science, of reason, and of self-interest ; and when it goes the length, which it commonly does, of denying, or at any rate casting doubt upon, the perfection of Christ's character, it takes away the only example men can safely follow.

Rationalism is not provided with any high and powerful motive to influence men for good, to lead them to exercise self-denial and self-sacrifice, to cause them to devote themselves to the welfare of society or of any portion of it. Gratitude to God has no place, obedience to God has no place, in a system which teaches that perhaps there is no God. The love of Christ which has constrained men to such blessed glorious acts of beneficence is a motive which rationalism, once grown into scepticism, can have nothing to do with ; for the doctrine of the atonement, on which *mainly*, if not exclusively, the love of Christ is based, is scouted by such rationalism, as a fiction and an absurdity. Further, rationalism cannot deal with the sense and conviction of sin ; it is often a deep and most painful conviction that gives the soul no rest, that asks piteously for some method and some token of forgiveness. The rationalism of unbelief has not a word to say, unless it be a word of scorn that reaches the sufferer, and tells him that there is no such thing as sin, or if there be, it will not be

brought into judgment in the world to come, because there is *no* world to come.

Rationalism fails us just where we most need help and guidance : it may accompany us to the end of our earthly journey, casting much light over our path, instructing us, interesting us, and proving of great advantage to us in many things of a secular character ; but the end of the journey is reached, and rationalism can go with us no further, and its light goes out. It cannot even say Good-bye, because it does not know that there is a God ; it cannot even say farewell, because it does not know that there is any fare, well or ill, beyond the grave. Not a word of hope, not a word of pity in that hard, cold thing : it takes its leave of us, and we go alone into the thick darkness ; perhaps trying, as we go, to comfort ourselves with the miserable possibility, that we are sinking into annihilation.

Mr. Lecky, one of the most ardent admirers and ablest exponents of rationalism, admits that it has very serious defects. ‘ Utility,’ he says, ‘ is perhaps the highest motive to which reason can attain ; ’ he laments the discouragement given by rationalism to disinterestedness, to generosity, to self-sacrifice, to true moral heroism.

Rationalism will not grow much of the stuff of
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which martyrs are made, of which true patriots and philanthropists are made, of which the highest and best examples of character are made ; and certainly it does nothing in the way of answering many of the questions that press most upon a thoughtful mind, or satisfying many of the noblest aspirations of the human heart.

These defects, which are inherent in its very nature, and cannot be made up for by any other perfections, however valuable, will probably in time form a check to rationalism, and cause it to be rejected as so many other systems have been rejected. And rationalism, now in all the height of its greatness and its strength, may turn out to be only a passing wave of thought, over which the ark of God's covenant of grace will float with safety, thus giving another witness to its unchangeable strength, to the wisdom of Him who guides it, and to the security of those who have fled to it for refuge.

V.

ABOUNDING IN THE WORK OF THE LORD.

'Therefore, my beloved brethren,' be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.'—1 COR. xv. 58.

THE relations in which this verse stands, both to what precedes it and to what follows it, are worthy of notice. The long chapter of which it is the closing sentence is devoted to the doctrine of the resurrection. Strange to say, that doctrine was by some doubted, and by some denied, in the Christian church at Corinth. They appear to have made the resurrection of Christ no exception ; they declared that there was no such thing as the resurrection of the dead. The spirit in which Paul dealt with this species of infidelity is very remarkable. He did not express indignation, as he did with regard to an act of immorality which had disgraced the Corinthian church ; he did not command the exclusion from the church of these impugners of the resurrection, as he commanded the exclusion of those who had committed that

immoral act. On the contrary, he discussed the heresy with great calmness, and in the whole discussion said scarcely a word in disparagement of those who denied so important, so essential a truth of the gospel. Nor was he in a hurry to correct the error. The churches in Galatia were far from firm in the faith with regard to justification : they mixed up the law with the gospel, and gave heed to those who taught that, unless they kept the former, the latter could not save them ; and when writing to these churches Paul does not lose a moment, but at once, after a word of salutation, enters upon the subject, saying, ‘I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel.’ But here the apostle deals with several matters upon which the Corinthian Christians were at fault :—the spirit of division which existed among them ; their connivance at the act of immorality to which I have already alluded ; their litigiousness ; their disputes about meat offered to idols ; their ignorance, and their many other failings in regard to the use of spiritual gifts ; their lack of charity ; the confusion and disorder of their religious assemblies. And it is not until he has filled fourteen chapters with instruction and correction upon these subjects that he takes up this, which

seems to be the most serious of all, the denial of the resurrection, the denial even of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. In the fifteenth chapter, however, he does take this subject in hand, and so treats it that we may be thankful that such error did exist in the Corinthian church, since that error called forth the masterly and glorious statement of which our text forms the appropriate conclusion.

Now let us briefly notice how our text springs from that lengthy and elaborate argument concerning the resurrection. The denial of this doctrine, or doubt in regard to it, could not but prove exceedingly damaging to all Christian effort. To what purpose should these Christians work in Christ's service? 'For if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen. And if Christ be not risen, . . . your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.' In this chapter Paul knows nothing of eternal life, nothing of a future state, excepting in connection with the resurrection of the dead. Doubt in regard to this was doubt in regard to immortality. But now, if Paul's readers be convinced by what he has said, first, concerning the witness borne to the resurrection of Christ, and, secondly, concerning the resurrection of those

who are Christians, they cannot but feel greatly comforted and cheered ; and if stedfast and unmoveable in the faith of a risen Christ, and of the resurrection to eternal life of all who believe in him, they may be expected to abound in the work of the Lord, knowing that their labour is not in vain, which it certainly would be were there no resurrection either of the Lord or of His people.

And now as to what follows the text. Perhaps it would be an improvement if there were no division of chapters at this point. The next chapter certainly introduces another subject very different from that which fills the fifteenth, but still this subject springs from the previous discussion. Faith in the resurrection should cause these Christians to abound in the work of the Lord, and there is a part of the Lord's work at once brought forward—‘Concerning the collection for the saints.’ Let the Corinthian Christians, now strengthened in their faith by what Paul has taught them concerning the resurrection and eternal life,—let them now abound in this work of the Lord, laying by in store on the first day of the week, as God prospered them, for the relief of their suffering brethren in Judea.

It seems a long way, a long descent from that shout of triumph, ‘Thanks be to God which

giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ,' down to this collection for the saints, but the two things are very closely related. How should these Corinthian Christians express their thankfulness to God for giving them the victory over death and the grave? When thanks are only words, they go for very little; thanks should take the form of deeds. And the Corinthian Christians could show that they thanked God for that great victory, by being bountiful in that collection for the saints. And this brings me back again to the context which precedes our text. Let us read the 57th and 58th verses together:—

'But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.'

Thankfulness to God for giving us that victory is the ground and reason for our always abounding in the work of the Lord. Our thanks should take the form of Christian work.

Having now discussed the text in its contextual bearings, let us see what it has to say to us. 'The work of the Lord.' This is the subject of the text. And by 'the Lord' we here understand Christ.

This particular, though not exclusive, ascription of the name Lord to Him is very clearly stated by Paul in the eighth chapter of this epistle, at the sixth verse : ‘ But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him ; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him.’ There is a comma after the word God ; there ought to be a similar stop after the word Lord, and so we find it in the revised version. The work, then, of which the apostle speaks, and in which he urges the Corinthians to abound, is the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. That work is very large and various. A part of it, many parts of it, and most important parts of it, have been done, are being done, and will be done by Himself. It was the work of the Lord to declare the teaching recorded in the gospel, to set the example furnished in His life, to make the atonement provided by His death, to found His cause and kingdom in the world, to send down from heaven the Holy Ghost, the Comforter. It is the work of the Lord still to send down the Holy Ghost, to counsel, to assist, to sanctify and strengthen His people. It is the work of the Lord to make intercession as the world’s High Priest in the Holiest of All above. It is His work to control, and guide, and overrule all things to the furtherance of His great purpose

in regard to mankind. And it will be His work to subdue all things unto Himself, to raise the dead, to judge the world, to make all things new, to deliver the whole creation from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. All these things are the work of the Lord, His own personal work, the part or parts of His work undertaken by Himself alone. Not by any means a finished work; finished certainly as to the atonement He made for the world's sin, but in many respects unfinished, and indeed never to be finished. For in those parts of Scripture which speak of the remotest future, we find our Lord represented as still working. When all is over in connection with this present state of things, the Lamb will feed His people, and lead them to living fountains of waters; and the time will never come when our Lord will cease to work for the benefit and the happiness of His redeemed. As truly as they for ever will serve Him, He for ever will serve them. He was, He is, He will be among them as one that serveth.

But while there is the Lord's own personal work done, or to be done by Himself, work which none but He can do, and in which He can have none and need have none to help Him, there is other work which is His, inasmuch as He commands it,

and inasmuch as it relates to Him and to His cause. And this work He gives to His disciples that they always abound in it, even as He is always abounding in that part of the work which is peculiar to Himself; always abounding in mediation, for He ever liveth to make intercession for us; always abounding in forgiving sin, always abounding in the bestowment of His helping grace.

And this work of the Lord which He gives to us is large and various. It may be broadly described as of two kinds, or as having reference to two spheres of operation and endeavour; the one in relation to each believer's own self, the other to the world around him. When we speak of the work of the Lord, or of the Lord's work, we generally think forthwith of something to be done by way of extending the knowledge of His name, increasing the number of His disciples, advancing His kingdom upon the earth. But let us not be in such a hurry. There is another part of the Lord's work to which, quite as much as to anything external to ourselves, our attention, our care, our labour must be given; and that is the Christian cultivation of our own character, the work of the Lord in myself, in my own heart, in my own mind, in my own life. When I speak of the Lord's vine-

yard and of working in the Lord's vineyard, let me by all means remember that, as a Christian, I am myself a portion, though ever so small a portion, of that vineyard ; and that it behoves me, first and above all, to keep that, to render that as acceptable as I can in His sight, to keep it clear of weeds, to make it fruitful in all holiness of heart and life. The work of the Lord, then, in reference to myself is my own Christian culture in knowledge, in experience, in communion with Christ, in victory over temptation, in subduing self, in wrestling with my pride, my anger, my untruthfulness, my lack of love to Christ, my unbelief, my indifference to spiritual things, my worldliness of mind, and any and every other evil that is in me ; struggling with these things until every thought shall be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

That I may do this work of the Lord, I must read and mark and learn and inwardly digest His will as given in His word. I must be a reader of the Scriptures that can make me wise unto salvation ; I must meditate and reflect upon them ; I must pray often and earnestly for guidance and strength ; I must learn to abhor that which is evil, and to cleave to that which is good ; I must exercise patience and self-denial, that the work of

the Lord in my own soul may go on unto perfection. It is thus and thus only that we can fit and qualify ourselves for the work of the Lord that awaits us in the world, in our own families, in the Church, and among all our fellow-men.

Apart from this self-culture in all godliness, we shall have neither the disposition nor the power to enter upon, or, at all events, to persevere in the work of the Lord outside ourselves. And apart from such personal endeavour in the work of the Lord for personal holiness, we shall neither command nor deserve the attention of those among whom we may seek to do good. They will scornfully, and with reason, apply to us the proverb, ‘Physician, heal thyself.’ What hundreds of instances there are in which love and zeal and labour in the Lord’s work in the world are thrown away, and worse than thrown away, because they who so exert themselves do not by their own character and conduct fully exemplify what they teach !

Yet with this work of the Lord in himself no Christian ought to be satisfied, nor indeed can he be satisfied. On the contrary, just in proportion as the work of the Lord prospers in his own soul, will be his consciousness of duty and his earnestness of desire to do some work for the Lord outside

of his own personal Christian culture. His gratitude to his Lord, his own deliverance from the guilt and from the power of sin, his enjoyment of the peace with God to which he has attained, his consciousness of the unspeakable blessings which religion has conferred upon him, his assurance that what it has done for him it can do for all others, his compassion for those who are without hope and without God in the world, will move him, will constrain him, to work for the Lord among his fellow-men.

Nor for this need a Christian man wait until his knowledge and his character have fully fitted him for rendering such service. Let us think of the twelve apostles. When Jesus first sent them forth to preach the gospel, they were very ignorant of some of its first principles, and their character was very imperfect. Indeed, if we wait until we are satisfied, and have reason to be satisfied, with our own religious state, we shall never venture upon any work of the Lord either in the world or in the Church.

Abounding, always abounding in the work of the Lord. And surely, whether we think of this work in its personal aspect, or in its relation to others, it is plain that there is ample scope for abounding in it.

In regard to the work of the Lord in ourselves,

there is always abundance to be done. ‘Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect,’ says Paul after some thirty years of consistent Christian life and strenuous Christian effort. Even then he felt that he was defective, that he had not perfected holiness in the work of the Lord, that his personal godliness was incomplete even then. And so it is with all of us, the wisest, the most experienced, the most careful, the most devoted. There is much knowledge still to be sought after; there are many imperfections to be removed; our resemblance to our Lord is still but faint. We are often overcome of evil. We yield to this temptation and to that; there are sins that easily beset us; and so there is room for still abounding in this part of the work of the Lord.

And the other part of it, that which we do, or attempt to do, for the good of others. In a world of ignorance and sin and suffering there must always be as much work of the Lord to be done as the Lord’s people can do. There is abundant employment for every variety of gift, for all time that can be spent, for all money that can be afforded, for all sympathy that can be expressed, for all ministration that can be exercised. I surely need not speak further on this matter.

Some may be rather at a loss, and ready to ask,

What can I do in the work of the Lord? My friends, are you willing to engage in His work? For if you are, a little reflection and observation will most certainly discover something great or small, near or distant, that you can do or help to get done in the work of the Lord. If ever you are dissatisfied, impatient, disgusted with a useless, selfish life, neither doing, nor trying to do, any good in the world, you will soon discover something good and useful to which to devote yourself. There are some parts of the Lord's work that are especially neglected. There is a plentiful supply of ministers and preachers, such as they are. There is, I think, generally no lack of teachers in Sunday schools. But think of the very important work of speaking a word in season to those with whom you are conversant and familiar in daily life. Think how much good work might be done for the Lord in kindly asking and urging some to attend the house of God who never enter within its doors. Think of the many miserable homes, a visit to which, or a gift, easily afforded, would cheer and brighten. Think of young men in awful peril whom your influence might save from evil companions and evil ways. Is there not scope for abounding, and always abounding, in the work of the Lord?

And the apostle adds for our encouragement,—knowing that ‘your labour is not in vain in the Lord.’ One thing is very certain, and experience abundantly testifies to it, that our work in the Lord in the form of personal religious culture is not in vain. Pursuing this work of the Lord in our own minds and hearts, knowledge is increased, temptations are overcome, fellowship with God becomes closer, old things pass away and all things become new; we approach the stature of the perfect man in Christ, and peace becomes more peaceful, and joy more joyful, and we wax stronger and stronger in the Lord and in the power of His might. We become humbler, gentler, more charitable, in one word, more Christ-like:—truly, our labour is not in vain in the Lord.

Nor is our labour in the Lord’s work in the world labour in vain. The results of it, so far as we can measure them, may not be satisfactory; there may be much disappointment, much trial of faith and patience. Some to whom we have been kind prove ungrateful, some to whom we hoped we had done real religious good fall away to the world, the flesh, and the devil. But let us remember the estimate which God’s Word puts upon Christian work when its result is what many would

think small. ‘Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.’ Therefore, ‘In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.’

And indeed our labour is not in vain in the Lord if we have only this as its result, the testimony of a good conscience, that we have faithfully tried to do our best among our fellow-men.

And if we would be stedfast and unmoveable in our religious convictions, the best way of obtaining this blessing is to abound in the work of the Lord. In this the Corinthian Christians had failed. Instead of busying themselves in the Lord’s work, contributing to the collection for the poor and distressed brethren in Judea, instead of devoting themselves to missionary and other Christian enterprise, they idly gave heed to this and to that vain speculation which was brought under their notice.) Their religion was of a weak and sickly sort. It had not been braced up by persecution, and it had not exercised itself in active, laborious, self-denying Christian work. And I

think that it will generally be found, that those who are most in doubt concerning the truths of the gospel, those to whom the atonement, the work of the Spirit, the life to come, are matters scarcely believed in, are persons who lead lives of indolence in so far as religion is concerned. Through not giving themselves heartily to the work of the Lord, they have not in themselves the testimony of experience which drives doubts away like chaff before the wind. In religious as in physical life, work is a grand source of health, and strength, and cheerfulness, and happiness.

VI.

THE TWO PATHS.

‘Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass away. For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence.

‘But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

‘The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble.’—PROV. iv. 14-19.

PART I.—THE PATH OF THE WICKED.

THE path of the wicked and the path of the just are the subjects which Solomon sets before us in these verses. It is impossible to say with certainty whether Solomon here gives us his own thoughts, or continues to present those instructions which his father had given him, and which he introduces thus at the third verse, ‘For I was my father’s son; . . . he taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words; keep my commandments, and live.’ And so in the fourth verse it is David who speaks through Solomon, and

there is neither any break nor any turn of expression to show where David's counsel ends, and Solomon's own counsel begins anew. Perhaps we may regard all these verses to the end of the chapter as Solomon's recollections of what his father taught him ; and I think that we shall find in David's Psalms passages in which the path of the wicked and the path of the just are described in language not unlike that which we find in the text.

And first, concerning the path of the wicked.

David had said to his son Solomon, 'Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men ; avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. For they sleep not, except they have done mischief ; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence. . . . The way of the wicked is as darkness ; they know not at what they stumble.'

Bad men are here described in such terms as imply a very wretched state of society. These sinners are such as we have read of before, in the first chapter of this book ; men who say, 'Come, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause ; we shall find all precious

substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil.' The men of whom David speaks in the text are plainly robbers and murderers; men who delight in acts of violence and plunder; men to whom such deeds are meat, drink, and sleep. David, as king of Israel, had had much trouble with such scoundrels. In his earlier days, when Saul sought his life, he had had many an encounter with such ruffians as he here speaks of. Men of this stamp are to be met with still; they form the criminal classes. I do not suppose that it is needful to warn any of my hearers against joining their ranks.

But there are other evil-doers who are much more dangerous, because their evil-doing is not so criminal, is not usually of a sort that exposes them to the penalties of the law. There is, of course, much evil which law cannot suppress; idleness, the undue love of what people call pleasure, extravagance, gambling, drunkenness, uncleanness. David speaks of the robbers and murderers as finding pleasure in their wickedness, and the same thing may be said of many other evil-doers. To many a vicious man his besetting sin is as his meat and drink: he would rather live with his sin in poverty and pain and disgrace, than without it in plenty, health, and honour!

There is one feature of bad men pointed out in the text that is well worthy of notice: ‘Their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall;’ that is to say, they cannot rest unless they do mischief to some one. There are men who take an intense pleasure in corrupting their juniors and making them as bad as themselves; teaching them to curse and swear and use all manner of filthy language; persuading them to go with them to the public-house to drink, and get drunk; undermining, by means of ridicule and what they call argument, whatever religious principles and moral convictions they may find in those whom they are determined to destroy; tempting them to spend their earnings in idleness and amusement, and to forsake the house of God. Such is the ordeal through which thousands of lads have to pass when they leave school and are sent to business. In fact, it would seem that one of the chief pleasures of sin lies in making others sinful; just as, on the other hand, one of the chief pleasures of goodness is making others good.

Not always as a roaring lion doth the arch-enemy go about seeking whom he may devour; more frequently in his older form of the serpent, subtilely, slyly, stealthily. I wish he always did go about as a roaring lion, for then people would be

afraid of him. But he is far too wise to do that. So he comes in other forms ; in the form of a man with fascinating manners, or of a woman with bewitching charms, and sometimes in the form of a hypocrite wearing a cloak of piety.

The art of making proselytes is not confined to religious people. From the days of the Pharisees, and from long before their time, it has been practised by evil men and evil women, with an earnestness, a zeal, a patience, which the best men in their proselytizing would do well to imitate. ‘ Their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall ; ’ our sleep is not taken away, because we are not the means of saving those that have fallen.

Doing good is not so much the meat and drink of religious people, as doing evil is the meat and drink of sinners. The devil has many busy workers, to the full as busy as any that Christ can count upon ; busy in sowing tares among the wheat ; busy in pulling down what the servants of Christ build up ; as busy, and perhaps as successful, in perverting souls as Christ’s servants are in converting them. Whence let Christian people learn, that they really must be up and doing—wakeful, watchful, workful, prayerful. Let us take a leaf out of the wicked men’s book. If they be so zealous to corrupt the young, let us be no

less zealous to save them from corruption. If they tempt them to evil, let us allure them to good. If we cannot appeal so strongly to their appetites and passions, we can appeal far more strongly to their conscience, their common sense, their self-respect, and their worldly interests. Don't let the devil's advocates have it all their own way in the office and in the workshop. Let the simple, who are on the verge of being led astray, be warned, entreated, taken by the hand, dealt with kindly, made as welcome to us as we know they are to those who seek their ruin. Let them see that Christian people can be joyful, can be merry, can laugh and sing and play, and enjoy all the good that there is in life far more than is possible for the ungodly. And if they sleep not except they have done mischief, let us not sleep except we have done good.

One reason why evil men are so successful in gaining converts is, that they seldom do their work by deputy. They do not hire others to do it; they do not send town missionaries to exhort people to break the Sabbath, and to frequent the pot-house, and to throw off all regard for goodness and for decency: no, they do their work themselves, and so see that it is done. With scarcely any organization, they are more successful than

Christians are with all their carefully organized institutions. This is another leaf in their book from which Christians may learn something; from which Christians may learn this, that they too must personally exert themselves, and not rely upon work done by deputy, good as such work may be. Let us remember that wise proverb, as applicable to the business of religion as to any other: 'If you want a thing done, go; if not, send!'

Our text says, 'The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble.' They are blind; blinded sometimes by ignorance, sometimes by passion. They do not see what their true interest is. / 'There are none so blind as those who *will* not see,' and it is really astonishing to notice how determined many people are not to see what their sinful course must lead to and must end in. I have very seldom known, indeed I do not remember a single case, in which either disease, or pain, or early death, or poverty, or disgrace, or imprisonment, or madness, or any other result of wrong-doing, acted to any great extent as a warning to others pursuing the same way to destruction. The effect, if there be any effect at all, soon passes off. Not a week passes but some one is detected in fraud and embezzlement, but every other thief

thinks himself cunning enough to be safe. ‘Dead through excessive drinking’ is the verdict given day by day, all the week through, and all the year round; but every other excessive drinker thinks that he does not drink to excess, or that he has a constitution that will stand it. Thus, verily, ‘the way of the wicked is darkness.’ They have allowed such devils as drink and greed and lust to put out their eyes, and they are as blind as bats.

‘Their way is as darkness, and they know not at what they stumble.’ A man walking in total darkness comes against this and against that, and knows not what it is; so the wicked ‘know not at what they stumble.’ A man gets drunk, and does not know to what calamity his drunkenness may lead. A man enters upon a career of gambling, and knows not how soon he may thereby be tempted to defraud his employers; and when the temptation comes he yields to it, and knows not into what trouble that yielding may bring him, and his family, and his friends. Perhaps such men may come to know afterwards; their eyes are rudely opened to see the ugly, dreadful consequences of their wrong-doing; and then, when it is too late, they exclaim in weak-minded astonishment, ‘Oh, if I had only had any idea that my conduct would have brought me to this, I should have acted more

wisely.' 'If you had had any idea!' And what a fool you must be not to have had any idea of what it would come to! For what purpose were your brains given to you, but to form such ideas as should keep you out of evil, and lead you into that which is good?

If there be any one here whose way is darkness, whose path lies in the darkness of sin, among dark deeds of devilry, in drunkenness, in dishonesty, in sensuality, let him depend upon it that he knows not against what he may at any moment stumble; for his path is full of snares and traps and pitfalls, dug for his destruction. Something that he little expects will take place; or something against which he thinks he has well guarded himself will surprise him. My friend, you are in this darkness, this dreadful moral darkness. You may know many things and think yourself very clever, as most foolish people do; but you do not know what fell disease, the consequences of your sensual indulgence, has not begun to make you its prey. You do not know what conspiracy may not be arrayed against you by men or by women who fawn upon you and flatter you, but who, knowing that you are a goose, are resolved to pluck you until you have not a feather left. And you, young man, tampering with money that is not

yours, you do not know what a watch may be set upon you, to dog you in all your steps, and pounce upon you when you least expect it. And although now you are respected, and perhaps not altogether unworthy of respect, you do not know to what an abyss of infamy you may sink. In short, you do not know at what you may stumble ; but it is very certain you will not go far upon that road, before stumbling upon something that will give you an ugly fall, perhaps upon the brink of hell, whence you will fall into eternal perdition.

The way of the wicked is darkness ; darkness here, and hereafter the blackness of darkness for ever.

And therefore we say : ‘Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men ; avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass away.’

Why these repetitions ? Why these six earnest warnings ? Well, if these were sixty, there would not be too many. More than sixty warnings have been addressed to many a man, to many a lad, but all to no purpose. It shows the intense earnestness of Solomon, or of David, if we consider the words as his counsel to his son ; it shows his intense earnestness when we find such repeated entreaty, — entreaty not only not to enter into

the way of the wicked, but actually to avoid it, not to go near it, to turn altogether from it, and pass away as far as possible. There are many who think that they can without danger go near to the way of the wicked, look at it, talk of it, read about it; that they can stand upon that doubtful ground which is neither wholly good nor wholly bad; that they may indulge in things that are not positively sinful, though often made sinful by excess. They think they can go to places which, though harmful to others, will not be harmful to them. They have listened to some tempter who has persuaded them to embark in some risky speculation. They want money to carry out their purpose; they will use their employer's money with the most sincere and honest intention of refunding it, and with what they think the sure and certain prospect of being able to refund it. And thus many are lured to their destruction. They think that they will cheat the devil, but find themselves most awfully mistaken. Coil after coil is wound about them. By going a little further in dishonesty, they hope to get into a position that will enable them to set themselves all right again. They tell one lie to cover another, and a third to cover that, and so go on from bad to worse until their case becomes

desperate, and there is nothing for it but a bold leap into crime.

And so with sins of a sensual sort : first, perhaps, the lust of the eye, and then the lust of the flesh ; conscience in the meantime becoming weaker and weaker to resist temptation. Depend upon it, young man, a truer thing was never said than is said in the proverb, ‘He needs a long spoon that would sup with the devil.’ You think you have a long spoon, but men who had longer spoons than yours have been caught and killed ; men as well educated and as well principled as you, have been lost through dallying with sin, thinking to enjoy it without having to pay the cost.

Solomon had in his great wisdom a very long spoon, but when he supped with the devil it was not long enough ; the devil caught him, and very nearly did for him. In his apostleship, his friendship with our Saviour, and all his other Christian privileges, Judas Iscariot had a long spoon, but it was not long enough ; he supped with the devil, and was done for. The devil gave him a rope, and told him to go and hang himself.

A shrewd proverb says, ‘The devil is wise because he is old.’ Yes ; he is old, and it is hard to deceive him. We are all novices in his arts. Every trick we try to play upon him, however

new to us, is an old trick to him, and a trick of his own contrivance, and we have no chance with him at all.

If you are not in the way of evil men, do not enter it, do not go near it. A man with ever so strong a head had best keep well from the edge of the cliff, unless some call of duty bids him go to it ; a man in ever so good health had best keep out of the way of infectious disease, unless some call of duty bids him enter the scene of danger. And duty may call us to know many a sink of physical evil in the endeavour to do good ; but duty will never call any man to the verge of vice, to the borders of crime. Duty calls us in quite other directions, to quite other places. So, ‘ avoid the way of the wicked, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.’

But perhaps some here have entered on that evil way. If so, then, for God’s sake leave it before it be too late ; leave it at any cost, at any sacrifice ; break up all the friendships you have formed upon that path ; forsake the pleasures you are enjoying in that dangerous course ; quit that way at once ; don’t take another step onward ; let no glittering temptation allure you further. The way you are on is very certain soon to become hard, though, so far as you have gone, it may have been easy. The

further you go, the more difficult you will find it to retrace your steps ; thousands a little in advance of you would give the world if they could but go back, but they are holden with the cords of their sins. Their strength is gone ; their will is gone ; they are taken captive by Satan at *his* will. Come back ! come back ! It will perhaps be a hard climb since you have gone down so far, and down a very steep place. But stop, and turn, and try to return, and ask God to help you to climb up from that sink to which you have fallen, and He will let down the cords of His grace, cords long enough to reach you however low you have sunk, and strong enough to bear you however you are burdened with guilt ; and ere long you shall sing, ‘He drew me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings ; and He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God : many shall see it and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.’

Perhaps it may be said that all this homily about the path of the wicked comes with a bad grace from Solomon, and with just as bad a grace from David, if Solomon be repeating what David had said to him. For David and Solomon both walked a long way upon that path, and did things as bad as any we are likely to do, and perhaps a good deal

worse. Well, perhaps it does come from such men with a bad grace ; but it comes with the force of experience. They knew how evil the path of the wicked is ; they knew how dark it is ; and they had learned some of the things at which men who walk in it stumble ; David stumbling into adultery and murder ; Solomon stumbling into sensuality and idolatry. Let them speak ! yes ! let them speak in the bitterness of their souls ! Who should warn more powerfully than those who have suffered ?

PART II.—THE PATH OF THE JUST.

‘The way of the wicked is as darkness ;’ ‘but the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.’

By the just we are to understand the good man ; not a man altogether free from sin, but taking the word in a generous and not over exact sense, in which it so commonly occurs in Scripture, we may apply it to any man who, though far from faultless, sincerely desires and earnestly strives to live in all things according to the will of God.

For, to look for a moment at the meaning of this word just, it signifies *commanded*. A just man is a commanded man, a man whom God commands, a man who acts according to God’s commandments. And so the just man is something more than a

man who is true, honest, fair in his treatment of his fellow-men. You may in every transaction of business and in all social matters be as true, as honest, and as fair as a man can be, and yet you may not be a just man, you may be very unjust. Obey the eighth and ninth commandments, and that is enough to make you just, as justice is commonly understood ; but God has given us other commandments, both in the law and in the gospel, and no man is just, no man is perfectly commanded of God, who, wilfully or through neglect, transgresses any one of His commandments. Strictly speaking, there is as much injustice in unkindness as in fraud, in intemperance as in falsehood. The just man is he who, to the full extent of his knowledge of God's will, obeys it, or does his best to obey it, and so is a commanded man.

And the path of the just is the just man's course of life. So strong is the resemblance between life and a journey that this comparison is found, I suppose, in all times and in all languages. It is one of the oldest of all similitudes ; we read that Enoch walked with God. And Solomon, or David through Solomon, compares the just man's life to the shining light which, from the faintest glimmer of the dawn, grows, moment by moment, chasing away the darkness, revealing objects before invisible,

and making clearer things that were dimly seen, until the sun comes up in all his glory, and all nature rejoices in the lustre and the beauty of the perfect day. And so in these words we have a description of a good man's life, in its character, its progress, and its perfection.

'The path of the just is as the shining light.' Now, as the light of which the proverb speaks is the light of the morning, the similitude suggests the thought that the Christian life is one which has come out of darkness. It was not light from the beginning; it was, perhaps, for a long time a walking in darkness. Thus we find the case stated in Scripture. Paul's work as an apostle was to 'turn men from darkness to light.' Peter speaks of Christians as those whom God has 'called out of darkness into His marvellous light.' Sometimes, indeed, the light comes so early in life that there is but a faint remembrance of the darkness. Children may be so brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and may see so much holy light shining in the character and conduct of their parents, that they are, one may say, in the light from the beginning of their lives. And it is a blessed thing when this is so, and nothing is ever known by experience of the ways and the works and the power of darkness.

But as, in this latitude, the dawn at one time of the year begins so early that one may say there is no darkness through the whole day, and at another time of the year begins so late that the day is nearly half gone before the sun is seen,—so it is with that change which sets a person's course of life in the light of Christian truth and Christian duty. At whatever point in man's short life that change is wrought, let God be thanked for it; only, the later it is, the less happy, the less useful is the portion of life that follows it. The early conversion, by all means; the early conversion which gives the full day of Christian life and work, that is, in every way and by far, the best.

Light is a word that in Scripture bears several meanings. It means knowledge, holiness, and happiness; knowledge in relation to the mind, holiness in relation to the conscience, happiness in relation to the heart. It means knowledge. I need not quote passages to prove this. I should think that all languages bear witness to it. An enlightened man is a man of knowledge; all knowledge is so much light. But the knowledge which the Scriptures have in view when they thus use the word light is the knowledge of God, and this, in its highest sense, is the knowledge of Christ, in whom God has been pleased to reveal Himself more plainly

than in any of His works. And so, regarding the New Testament as the best interpreter of the Old, we find that these words, ‘The path of the just is as the shining light,’ mean that the Christian life is a life of knowledge, of divine knowledge, and of divine knowledge in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Again, light has in Scripture a distinctly moral meaning. It stands for holiness. Our Saviour says, ‘Let your light so shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven.’ In saying this, our Lord tells us that the light is good works. And so, when we say that ‘the path of the just is as the shining light,’ we mean that the Christian life is a life of good works ; or in other words, a holy life, abounding in all goodness, a life of righteousness, truthfulness, sobriety, purity, charity, and all obedience to the will of God.

Further, light is the emblem of happiness. Thus we read, ‘Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.’ There is a naturalness in this emblem which we all feel, when we contrast the gloom of a cloudy night with the cheerfulness of a fine sunny day. And thus our proverb speaks of the happiness of a godly life. It is light, not darkness. It is much mistaken when spoken of, or thought of, as a life of sadness; an idea

of the Christian life for which we have to thank many of our hymn writers, and many theologians and preachers who, it is to be feared, have scared from Christianity more than they have drawn to it, by magnifying the difficulties and trials of a Christian life ; taking, for example, Paul's words that were spoken to the persecuted Christians at Ephesus and applying them to all Christians, 'Through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom of God.' Rely upon it, a man passes through far more tribulation on the way to hell than on the way to heaven ; passing through all the unwholesome excitement of evil passions and evil deeds ; passing through the manifold evil consequences of sin. These are the men who pass through much tribulation ; these travellers on the path of the wicked, of whom the Psalmist so truly says, ' Destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace they have not known.' But, as one of our joyful and not sorrowful hymns says :

'The hill of Zion yields
A thousand sacred sweets,
Before we reach the heavenly fields,
Or walk the golden streets.
Then let our songs abound,
Let every tear be dry,
We're marching through Emmanuel's ground,
To fairer worlds on high.'

Yes, through Emmanuel's ground, *not* the devil's,

as our preachers of a sorrowful countenance tell us. No, this world is Emmanuel's; He made it, He redeemed it, He loves it, and He will create it anew; and so He will 'make its wilderness like Eden, and its deserts as the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.' The path of the just is as the shining light; it is a life of knowledge, of holiness, of happiness.

And it is a life of growing knowledge, holiness, and happiness: for it is a shining light that shineth more and more; it is like the dawning of the day, ever waxing brighter. It is therefore a life of increasing knowledge; and this, I think, will be found true in regard to the individual and to the whole Church of Christ. Like all other enlightenment, Christian enlightenment is gradual. The close study of Scripture, the enlargement of reflection, observation, and experience, add to the knowledge of God, of His ways, and of His will; but, above all things else, obedience leads to increase of divine knowledge. Jesus said, 'If any man will do the will of My Father, he shall know of the doctrine.' There would not be half the doubt there is in many minds in regard to the truth of Christianity, if people would only set themselves to Christian duty. It is in connection with

Christian work that we find the best evidences that Christianity is of God, and when we find it working in us, to will and to do of God's good pleasure.

And the Church should be growing wiser and wiser, and I hope it is. When I look back, I cannot find the time when the Church, or any portion of it, was as much enlightened as many portions of it are now. I do not see any reason to regret the decline of puritanism, at any rate of some parts of the system so strongly upheld by the Puritans. Their knowledge of Scripture was inferior to ours. They saw in Christian doctrine some very ugly, awful things, which they firmly believed were realities. Their God was not so much love as hatred, not so much pity as fury, not so much righteousness as injustice, not so much kindness as cruelty. And the natural revulsion caused by such frightful dogmas, was the chief origin of the infidelity that sprang up some two hundred years ago, and exists to the present day. More light, some of it derived from nature and some from Scripture, has shown us, has at any rate shown some of us, that these awful, ugly things were not realities, that they were shapes which the good men's imaginations conjured up in an age of comparative darkness; and probably more light in

time to come will discover still more of what is reasonable and good and gracious in God's character and will and purposes.

And Christianity will become more beautiful and more attractive, when all the dark dogmas of man's devising, that have made it repulsive to many minds, shall have been cleared entirely away. The current of religious thought and of religious literature has of late been setting more and more away from what people call theology to Christ, to His person, to His character ; and this is a good sign. The true theology is in Him who is both the *θεός* and the *λόγος*. To see Him is to see God ; to know Him is to know God ; for God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

The shining light which shineth more and more, means increasing knowledge : it also means, increasing holiness ; growth in grace ; the becoming not only wiser and wiser, but also better and better. The light shining more and more, means our becoming more and more truthful, more and more just, more and more humble, more and more tender-hearted, more and more useful. We should certainly be startled, amazed, and alarmed, if the

dawn, having begun and made some progress, were to pause, and in a good half hour show no marked increase of light, but rather a decline. We should think that surely the foundations of the earth were out of course, that it had stopped going round upon its axis, or that something awful had happened to the sun ; and there is ground for wonder, for alarm, and for consideration, if we find that the light of holiness is stationary, that there is no increase of faith and love, of zeal, of liberality and all other Christian graces. Such a state of soul may well raise the question, Am I really a Christian ? For ‘the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more.’

This path is progress in knowledge, progress in goodness ; and it is progress in happiness too. A Christian man may experience this if he will, and if he go the right way about it. If he make advancement in knowledge and in goodness, his advancement in happiness is certain. The more a man knows of God and of Christ, the happier he must become. Ignorance makes men afraid of God, makes God an object of terror to them ; knowledge takes that fear away, and makes God a man’s chief joy. And in this, I think, the religion of the Bible stands out distinct from all others. They tell us of gods whom we cannot but despise ;

or of gods whom, if we believed in them, we should dread.] The Bible alone tells us of a God in whom we can rejoice.]

And the growth of happiness, depending in some measure upon increasing knowledge of God, depends perhaps in a yet greater measure upon increasing obedience to God. There are Christians who are not happy, and many of them do not deserve to be happy. In keeping God's commandments there is great reward ; but no reward if His commandments be not kept,—if you be not a just, that, is a commanded man. Find some good work and do it; rise above self; think as little as you can about self; live for others; toil for others; if need be, suffer for others; and you will feel that in regard to happiness your path will be 'as the shining light, that shineth more and more.'

'Unto the perfect day.' And what is the perfect day? I do not think that it is ever seen, ever experienced by Christians in this world. I think that if you were to ask an intelligent and humble-minded Christian, whose pilgrimage is drawing to a close, 'Brother, is it the perfect day with you?' he would reply, 'Not yet. It is not perfect day, because still I see only as through a glass darkly, and still I know but in part. It is not perfect day, because, in holiness as well as in

knowledge, I feel that I am very defective. It is not perfect day, because still I have trouble and sorrow and pain.' A poor idea of the perfect day that man must have who thinks that he has already attained to it. Let us be thankful for every advance toward it that we make; but the perfect day is heaven; the perfect day is that state of which it is written, 'There is no night there;' the perfect day is not until the end of the world, when, as our Lord says, 'the righteous shall shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father!'

What is it that makes the difference between night and day, that changes night into day? It is just this, that the earth, or that portion of it on which we live, turns towards the sun; and it is the turning of our souls towards Him who is the Sun of Righteousness that makes our night of ignorance and sin and sorrow turn into the day of knowledge and goodness and happiness. And perhaps we do not overstrain the metaphor, when we learn from it the certainty of the world's being converted from darkness and made light in the Lord. There is no power in this world that can stop, for one moment, the progress of the dawn; there is no power in this world that can put a brake upon the whirling globe, as it turns upon its axis; five hours hence every mountain in Great

Britain, every island, every country in these longitudes, from the Arctic to the Antarctic Circle, will begin to move towards the sun, with a motion that nothing can resist, that nothing can retard. Thus certain, thus resistless, may be the gradual turning of the world of men to their Sun, their Light, Jesus Christ. Under the guidance of Christian truth, and by the power of the Spirit of God, the world is, I think, advancing to its perfect day. In all the triumphs of art and science, we see the darkness driven back and the light shining more and more, as old errors are exploded and new truths discovered ; in all the improvement of man's temporal condition through the influence of Christianity we observe the approach of the perfect day ; and there are signs on every hand that God, in His great love to the world, will do for it exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think, to the praise of the glory of His grace, through Jesus Christ !

The path of the wicked and the path of the just. The all-important question for us is, on which path have we entered ? for every man is either upon one or upon the other. May God, in His mercy, stop him who is walking in the way of evil, and turn his feet into the right path. May God, in His all-sufficient grace, bestow the spirit of persever-

ance upon him whom His grace has led into that path. And so, friends, may we all go on from knowledge to knowledge, from holiness to holiness, from happiness to happiness ; until, knowing as we are known, cleansed from the last stain of sin, blessed with the fulness of joy that is in the presence of our God, we all shall meet and live for ever in the light of the perfect day !

VII.

WAITING UPON GOD.

'Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.'—ISA. xl. 30, 31.

I NEED scarcely remark that the weakness and the strength spoken of in this noble passage of Scripture are not physical. Man's weakness is seen in his frailty, his mortality, his very limited powers of endurance; and God's strength is seen in His eternal and unchangeable existence, and in the power which created and sustains the universe. But it is not of such weakness and of such strength that the prophet here speaks.

Neither are this weakness and this strength of an intellectual character. Here again it would be easy to point to the amazing contrast, the infinite difference, between the highest attainments of human wisdom and the mind of the all-wise God.

But the weakness and the strength to which the prophet directs our thoughts are of what we may call a moral and spiritual sort: weakness

and strength, as related to such things as the performance of duty, the conquest of temptation, and the endurance of suffering.

It may be that weakness in relation to these things is not much deplored, and that strength in regard to them is not much desired ; it may be that most men are far more concerned to be strong in body and in mind than to be strong in heart and soul ; but really, for all the higher and nobler purposes of our being, no weakness is so deplorable, no strength so desirable, as the weakness and the strength of which the prophet speaks. Understand these things aright, and he is not the weakest man who is least muscular in body or least vigorous in mind ; nor is he the strongest man who is a Samson physically, or a Solomon intellectually ; but he is weakest who has least moral control over himself, and he is strongest in whom such moral control is perfect.

I. The prophet first tells us of our weakness : ‘Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall.’

Now, although Isaiah does not treat of the physical, he takes the physical to illustrate the moral and the spiritual. He speaks of man at his best physical estate as being overcome by fatigue, fainting, giving way, utterly falling. He does not

exactly repeat himself when he speaks of youths in one clause of his sentence, and of young men in the other. This latter expression is more emphatic than the former. Though youth is the period of strength and activity, there are many youths who are not so endowed, and the word 'youths' includes many who are too youthful to have attained to much strength. 'Even the youths shall faint,' give way. Yes, it may be said, because they are too young, because they are mere lads, from whom much endurance cannot be expected. But the prophet adds, 'And the young men shall utterly fall.' Now this phrase, 'the young men,' may be rendered 'the chosen youths,' and so they are called in the Septuagint or old Greek version,—the chosen youths, such as in time of war would be selected for difficult and dangerous enterprises; chosen because of their special fitness for such enterprises; chosen because of their strength, their activity, their hardiness, their courage; young men picked out from all the rest, the finest specimens of the physical man; men such as David describes when he speaks of Saul and Jonathan, swifter than eagles, stronger than lions. Yet even they shall be vanquished, even they shall utterly fall.

Now what does this mean when transferred to the moral and the spiritual? It obviously means

this, that morally and spiritually the strongest of mankind are weak, and are without much difficulty overcome. Think of Christ's disciples, before they were endued with power from on high, while as yet they had no strength but their own to sustain them. How they declared and vowed that they would never forsake their Master; how the very chief of them protested that, come what might, he would be faithful; and how they were all overcome by fear, and fled, while he who had been most confident utterly fell, and three times over even denied all knowledge of Him, with whom he had declared himself ready to go to prison and to death.

Most men at some period of their lives have formed good resolutions,—resolutions to avoid an evil course, or if it have been entered upon, to abandon it, and to pursue a path of virtue,—resolutions not to be overcome by anger, not to give way to intemperance, not to be made captive by lust,—resolutions to watch and guard their tongues, their tempers, their passions,—resolutions, it may be, to repent and turn to God, and become Christian men. Perhaps they have suffered through yielding to temptation and falling into sin, suffered much, suffered awfully, in mind, body, and estate, and good reason have they for forming such resolutions, and for keeping them resolutely and

faithfully. But what becomes of all these good resolutions and promises of amendment? In this form or that, temptation appears, and, like ice exposed to a burning sun, these good resolutions are dissolved; like chaff before a gale of wind, they are carried away and disappear. How the devil must laugh, as he hears a man say, 'I will not yield to this temptation; I will overcome this bad habit; I will conquer this deadly sin, and it shall not have dominion over me.' I should think that every sensible man must feel this, that it is with himself only a question of degree in the force of temptation, and there is no telling what evil he might not do,—that, left to himself, without any restraining and controlling power from on high, he has only to imagine a complete reverse in his circumstances, and then, though he may have been the very soul of mercantile honour, he might be guilty of any meanness or any dishonesty; though he may have been a pattern of sobriety, trouble might drive him into confirmed habits of intemperance. And if you be equal to adversity, are you a match for that more powerful foe, great prosperity? Could no amount of wealth or of honour be morally injurious to you, making you proud, worldly, forgetful of God? I speak now of man left to himself, of man without the grace of God, and I say it is only a question of

so much temptation, and the best man in the world would become, in mind and heart and life, as false and as foul in every respect as it is possible for a man to be.

Now, all this may appear to be nothing more than an apology for sin, and a very dangerous doctrine. We are morally weak, and temptation is too strong for us. Are we to blame when we do wrong? Is any man to blame when he does wrong, even if the wrong be murder? Is a man to blame when he gives way, and faints and falls under some burden, or some task that is too great for his physical powers? Is a man to blame because he utterly fails in comprehending subjects which his intellectual faculties are incapable of comprehending? And am I any more to blame if I yield to a temptation which I am not morally constituted successfully to resist? Why does not God make me stronger, or so order my lot that the temptations that assail me should be weaker, and such as I might be able to overcome?

Now, in this way our moral weakness might be pleaded as an apology for sin and in extenuation of our faults, if there were no remedy for it, if there were no moral strength to be had, if we were the utterly helpless sports of every gust of temptation, the prey of every evil passion. But thank God this

is not so. We are weak, but He is strong, and He offers us His strength. He is willing to impart to us of His own glorious power; His promise is, 'As thy days, so shall thy strength be.'

II. 'But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.' [The condition of receiving this strength is, that we wait upon the Lord.]

Now, what does this waiting upon the Lord mean? [Here it means these three things: trust, prayer, and obedience.] It means trust; ~~for~~ the Psalmist says, 'I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope;' and again, 'Wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from Him.' So they who wait upon the Lord trust in Him, expect help from Him, look to Him for the strength, their need of which they feel. They have no confidence in themselves, they have all confidence in Him. They are sure that He is able to make them strong, they know that He has promised to make them strong, and they honour Him by expecting that He will fulfil His promise.]

[This waiting upon God also implies prayer. To trust and not to pray is not God's appointed method; prayer must be the expression of our trust. He will be inquired of for that which we need,—'Ask and ye

shall receive ;' but there is no promise that we shall receive if we do not ask. And so, waiting upon the Lord for strength, means asking Him for strength.] And no prayer can be more acceptable to Him than such prayer as this ; we cannot ask amiss when we ask for strength to do God's will, to overcome temptation, to be patient in the endurance of trial.

And waiting on the Lord also means obedience. What do we mean when we say that one man waits on another ? Of course, we mean that he who waits, serves, being willing and prompt to do exactly as he is bidden. Waiting upon God, we look to what He tells us in His word, and set ourselves diligently to obey Him, in so far as He shall help us to obey ; and it is in the act or acts of obedience that God makes us strong, gives us the needful moral power. How do we become physically strong ? By physical exertion. How do we become intellectually strong ? By intellectual exertion. And so by spiritual exertion we are to become spiritually strong, to expect strength from God, to ask strength from God, and forthwith to go and serve God in all duty and all suffering, with the hope, with the confidence, that the promised strength will come. That is what is meant by waiting upon the Lord.

And they who do this shall renew their strength, — literally, they shall change their

strength ; that is to say, for their own poor strength, which is utter weakness, they shall have God's strength, they shall be strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power. No longer in their own strength but in His, they shall go forth to the performance of duty, to the struggle with temptation, to the endurance of suffering. And that divine strength shall be equal to all the demands that duty, temptation, or suffering may make upon them ; and therefore Paul says, 'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.' It is the very strength of God, that by His Spirit is infused into our hearts, that moral and spiritual strength which we see in our Lord Jesus Christ ; not the strength by means of which He stilled the storm and healed the sick and raised the dead, but the strength in which He met and vanquished the tempter in the wilderness,—the strength in which He persisted in His holy work, surrounded with discouragement and opposition,—the strength in which He boldly spoke truths which were regarded with disfavour and abhorrence,—the strength in which He loved and forgave and blessed His enemies,—the strength in which He bore, without a murmuring word or an angry feeling, all the calumnies, the wrath, the derision that assailed

Him,—the strength in which He patiently endured the scourge, the crown of thorns, the cross,—the strength in which, with reference to His bitter and awful suffering, He said, ‘Father, not My will but Thine be done,’—the strength that kept Him free from sin in thought, in word, in deed,—that is the strength that they shall have who wait upon the Lord. The Lord’s own strength; as Paul says, ‘Strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.’

And he who has such strength is strong indeed. No difficult or dangerous duty however arduous can weary Him, no temptation however great can conquer Him, no suffering however severe can either terrify Him or make Him restless, impatient, discontented. The strength thus given manifests itself; for they to whom it is imparted shall mount as on the wings of eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Perhaps it seems rhapsodical thus to speak of men made strong in the strength of the Lord, to compare them to eagles, soaring above the world and winging their way towards the sun; yet we tolerate, and we use, very similar language in speaking of the flights of a soaring imagination.

No one would complain, no one would think it absurd, if it were said of Milton, that in his *Paradise Lost* he often mounts as on eagle’s

wings. And the prophet may be pardoned, if in poetic phrase he thus speaks of the soul being able to mount above the world, when, strengthened with the strength of God, it soars on the wings of faith, and in thought and feeling mounts to the very gate and throne of heaven. Brethren, we are quite enough weighted and tied down to the world and to the things of the world :—shall we not be thankful if sometimes we can soar above them, forget them, and delight our souls in the contemplation of things spiritual, eternal, celestial, and divine ?

Let us not be grudged this luxury. Soon enough are we recalled to the cares and the troubles of this our earthly state. Shall I try to illustrate what is meant by these words, ‘They shall mount as on the wings of eagles’? Let me point you to Paul ;—he is a poor prisoner in Rome, chained to a soldier, waiting to be tried for his life, subjected to much privation and suffering ; but, as if utterly insensible to all these trying and painful circumstances, breaking away from the thought of them, soaring in spirit above them, he exclaims, ‘Now unto Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end.’ Again :

‘Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long, we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.’ And again: ‘O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’—In such passages you see Paul soaring as on the wings of eagles.

And John, too,—for whom at a very early period the Church appointed an eagle as a most appropriate symbol,—John, an exile in the island of Patmos, wrote his glorious Revelation; wrote what he saw and heard, when, under the mighty influence of the Spirit of God, he beheld the great white throne, and gazed upon the New Jerusalem, and listened with rapture to the Song of the Redeemed.

Nor was this mounting as on the wings of eagles the privilege of apostles only. What say you to a Christian man, lying in a dark and filthy dungeon, condemned to death for his fidelity to

Christ, and expecting a cruel martyrdom, yet expressing himself thus: ‘I have as much joy and gladness as ever I had; yea, such gladness that I cannot speak or write, I can sleep neither day nor night for rejoicing’?

But all Christian people may know something of this glorious sublimity of thought and feeling. In holy meditation upon Christ, His person and His work, His love and His promises, His second coming and the glory then to be revealed; in thinking of our privileges as the sons of God; in gazing into that wonderful future which is in store for us,—we mount as on the wings of eagles, in the glorious power of Christian trust and hope.

We talk of the feast of reason: faith, too, has its feasts, its seasons of high and holy communion with God, its times of refreshing from His presence, when the soul is filled with light and gladness, and overpowered with the sense of the glory and the beauty and the love of Christ. For our encouragement, for our happiness, for the strengthening of our faith, and as a refreshment amidst the toils of an earthly life, God has made it thus possible for us to soar in spirit to the very throne of His celestial glory, and with the eye of faith to see, and with the ear of faith to hear, the blessedness of that world which He has prepared for us.

But the Christian's life is not all a state of such elevation of mind and heart. 'Master, it is good for us to be here,' said Peter, when on the mount he saw Moses and Elias in glory with the Lord; and it was good for the disciples to be there, but good also that, not remaining there, they should descend again to their duties and their trials. And so the proposal to build tabernacles on the mount, and to remain there, was not received with favour. And if the strain of sacred rapture in divine meditation and communion could be maintained, still it would not be well to be absorbed and carried away in such a state of mind. I do not think that, in our Christian life, there is either as much as there might be, or as much as there ought to be, of that mounting as on the wings of eagles. Still, there might be too much of it, and it ought to be the recreation of the Christian soul, not its business; its occasional, not its normal business. And so, those whom God makes strong, He makes strong not only to mount as on the wings of eagles, but also to run and not be weary, and to walk and not faint.

It appears to be what is sometimes called an anti-climax, this flying, running, walking; but perhaps we shall find that it is not really so. To mount as on the wings of eagles, to be able

to forget the world, to forget the Church, to forget assemblies, to give our whole mind and heart and soul to such intense and delightful contemplations of, and communion with, the eternal and the unseen, the infinite and the divine, is well. God be thanked for every such glorious transport, lifting us so high above ourselves. But if we mount as on the wings of eagles, it should be in order that we may run without weariness, and walk without fainting. Let our souls go up to the very fountain of light and life and power in heaven, that, refreshed and strengthened, they may come down again to do manful battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

And it is, after all, more important that we run without weariness and walk without fainting, than that we mount as on the wings of eagles. The day will come when we shall mount to dwell for ever in that city of God ; and if the power so to mount in thought and feeling be denied us, or granted us in but very small measure, and at very distant intervals, let us be content. The practical in religion is more important than the contemplative, and religious work is better than religious enjoyment.

A distinction may, I think, be drawn between the two clauses, ‘They shall run, and not be

weary,' and 'They shall walk, and not faint.' The former clause seems to refer to activity, alacrity, and perseverance in God's service. They shall run like men in a race, each striving to be the foremost. I do not know that this running without being weary is descriptive of us, of those of us who profess to serve Christ. Perhaps some of us do run, but we run after pleasure, we run after money, we run after power; we are unwearied in the pursuit of those things, but we are not running in the path of Christian life and work. Or if we do pursue that path, we do so slowly, and often with a sense of weariness, constrained by a sense of duty rather than inspired by the ardour and joyfulness of love. Every toiler in God's service probably has been weary in that service, if not weary of it. It seems to so little purpose, we make so little progress, we gather so little fruit.

Well, let us betake ourselves to waiting on the Lord for more strength, more faith, more cheerfulness. So short is our time, so limited are our opportunities, so many are the souls that are perishing for lack of divine knowledge, that we ought to be in haste as men who run with might and main to save one from drowning, or another from perishing in the flames.

If then this running without being weary denote

activity and perseverance in doing the work of the Lord, what is meant by the promise, ‘They shall walk, and not faint’? Here, I think, we have a reference to Christian suffering. The idea seems to be that of men going a tedious journey, under a burning sun and bearing heavy burdens.

Such is the lot of many of God’s people; they are sorely afflicted and tried. As it was said of Israel, the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way, so it may often be said of the disciples of Christ. If it be so with us, let us wait upon the Lord for the renewal of our strength, and our strength will be renewed. Let us by the effect of believing prayer, praying not so much that our way may be made smoother and our burdens lighter, as that we may be made stronger and less foot-sore, and so be enabled to glorify, not ourselves, but Him who strengthens us, by walking in the path which He has appointed, and bearing to the uttermost every load that He lays upon us.

And now, I think, there is no anti-climax here; no real, though there be an apparent descent from the greater to the less; for of these three things, mounting as on the wings of eagles, running without being weary, and walking without fainting, the last is not the least but the greatest.

Great it is, I grant you, to have that gift of

divine strength, that enables you in heart and mind to go up to heaven and rejoice your soul in ravishing contemplation of its glories; but it is a greater thing to run with alacrity and perseverance on every errand on which your Lord sends you in this world, that you may minister knowledge, comfort, hope, salvation to your fellow-sinners. And greater still to have the strength which enables you to endure in patience, in submission, and in faith, heavy burdens of affliction and trial. Our Lord was greatest, not when He was glorified on the mount of transfiguration, nor when He went about doing good, but when He endured the suffering of the cross.

At any rate, without further enlarging upon these three manifestations of imparted strength, if we feel our weakness, our text teaches us how we may be made strong,—strong in faith, strong in hope, strong to labour, strong to endure, strong to perform every duty, to resist every temptation, to bear every trial.

God of all strength, do Thou strengthen us, and then in duty, in temptation, and in trial, exercise Thine own strength given to us, that Thy name may be glorified, and the all-sufficiency of Thine omnipotent grace be seen, when out of our weakness we are made strong by Thee!

VIII.

THE WRESTLING OF JACOB.

'And Jacob was left alone ; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh, and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name ? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel ; for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name ? And he blessed him there.'—GEN. xxxii. 24-29.

FEW events more mysterious than this are recorded in Scripture. The circumstances under which it occurred appear to have been as follows : Jacob's treatment of his brother Esau had rendered it necessary for him to leave his father's house and go to a distant land, where for a long time he lived with Laban, his mother's brother. There, being an industrious and ingenious man, he prospered greatly, and became the owner of very large possessions in sheep and oxen and other cattle. At last he had a violent quarrel with his uncle, and left him, taking with him his wives and his

concubines and his children, and all that he had, and departed, to return to the country in which his aged father Isaac was still living.

More than twenty years had passed since that bitter dispute with Esau, when Esau threatened to take away his life, and now he found that he must pass through a region in which Esau was a warlike and powerful chieftain. His conscience smote him and filled him with fear; he felt that he and all his were, humanly speaking, at Esau's mercy.

He sent a humble message to him, calling him his lord, calling himself Esau's servant, and begging that he might find favour in his sight; and when the messengers returned, and told him that Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred men, he was greatly afraid and distressed; and he made sure that Esau had hostile intentions, and would destroy him and all his house. However, he did not wholly lose his presence of mind. He divided the people that were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two companies, in order that if Esau attacked either, the other might perhaps escape.

And then he earnestly prayed to God for deliverance. He humbly acknowledged his unworthiness of the least of the mercies and the

truth which God had showed to him, for ‘with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands.’ He prayed that he might be saved from his brother Esau, and urged the promise, ‘Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.’ Then he prepared a worthy present, wherewith to propitiate Esau’s anger. He sent forward five several droves of valuable cattle, and then took his wives and his children and his servants, and passed over the ford of the Jabbok, which is a tributary of the river Jordan.

And now it was night, and Jacob was left alone, nervous and afraid. He had as yet received no answer to his prayer; his conscience, no doubt, troubled him; the past rose to his memory, that heartless extortion of the birthright at the price of a mess of pottage, that cruel deception by means of which he imposed upon his aged father, and obtained the inheritance of his father’s blessing, the anger and the menaces of Esau, who was now coming towards him with a band of armed men. He feared, and what made his fear all the harder to bear, was the consciousness that he deserved the destruction that he dreaded. Then he thought, no doubt, how good God had been to

him, notwithstanding his sin, and here was ground for hope; and yet again, possibly he had been favoured for a time, only that his ruin might be more complete.

Then came the mystery. An unknown person appeared, laid hold of him, wrestled with him, and they wrestled together until the breaking of the day. Our first inquiry is: Who was this mysterious being? First, he is called a man—‘There wrestled a man with him, until the breaking of the day.’ But we also find him called God, for when it was all over, ‘Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.’ Later on in Scripture, there is just one solitary passage, in which reference is made to this event. You will find it in Hosea xii. 3–5: ‘He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God: yea, he had power over the angel and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel, and there he spoke with us; even the Lord God of hosts; the Lord is His memorial.’

Here the person with whom Jacob wrestles is called both God and an angel, or rather *the* angel. Jacob himself seems to refer to this mysterious person, when he says, as we read in Genesis

xlviii. 16: ‘The angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads.’ Thus these three names are given to him who wrestled with Jacob, and with whom Jacob wrestled: he is called a man, he is called the angel (not an angel), and he is called God. —

Now, can we discern any one to whom these three names are applicable?

There is one, and one only—One Lord Jesus Christ. He is man; He is God; and He is the Angel, the messenger of the covenant, as He is distinctly called by Malachi: ‘And the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in.’ An angel is a messenger; it is a word that describes not the nature, but the office of him to whom it is applied.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for angel is used to denote human messengers, much more frequently than it is used to denote celestial beings; and in the New Testament the word “*Aγγελος*, or angel, is applied by John the Baptist to the messengers whom John the Baptist sent to ask Jesus, ‘Art Thou He that should come, or look we for another?’ It is applied also to the disciples whom Jesus sent before His face to make ready for Him in a village of the Samaritans,

and I do not know but that, when we read that an angel went down at a certain time to the pool of Bethesda, and troubled the waters, all that is meant may be, that a messenger—some man appointed for the purpose, like a bath-man at a spa—went at certain times of the day, and so stirred the waters as to mingle with them the mineral ingredients that gave them their sanative power.

But to our point. The word ‘angel’ is indicative, not so much of the nature as of the office of him to whom it is applied. Christ took not on Him the nature of angels, the nature of the celestial beings so called ; but he did assume the office of an angel or a messenger. He is God’s chief messenger, God’s great ambassador to the world; worthy above all others of being called *the* angel, the angel of Jehovah. Thus Jesus is man, and God, and angel. Each of the names given to him who wrestled with Jacob is applicable to our Lord ; and, taken together, to none but our Lord.

Now, in addition to this text, there are some wonderful passages in Scripture, which speak of God as appearing in the form of man before the incarnation of our Saviour. On one occasion three men appeared to Abraham, as he sat at the door of his tent ; and from the sequel we learn, that while

two of them were angels,—angels by nature as well as office, sent to deliver Lot out of Sodom,—one of the three was God, the God with whom Abraham pleaded for the guilty city. When Joshua was about to begin the conquest of Canaan, there appeared unto him a man with a drawn sword in his hand, who said, ‘ As captain of the Lord’s host am I now come,’—and Joshua worshipped him; and the man told him, as God at the burning bush told Moses, to take his shoes off his feet, because the place on which he stood was holy. In the form of a man also, God appeared to the father and mother of Samson. And so there seems good reason for believing, that before His incarnation, before He took upon Him the nature of man, our Lord manifested Himself in the human form, as we read in the book of Proverbs, ‘ His delights were with the sons of men.’ Instead of shrinking from the humiliation of becoming man, He seems to have delighted in the anticipation of it.

We must not forget the repeated and strong evidence of Scripture as to the invisibility of God. He is a Being whom no man hath seen or can see. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, He hath declared Him; that is to say, He hath revealed Him. As He said Himself, ‘ He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.’

What, then, are we to make of these appearances of God to Abraham, and Jacob, and Joshua, and Manoah, these appearances of a person who is called God and yet was seen in the form of a man? Brethren, He whom they saw was Christ,—Christ not as yet manifested in the flesh, but in some mysterious manner revealing Himself, and so revealing God, under the form of man! And so, if the question be asked, Who was this mysterious being that appeared to Jacob, the person called ‘man’ and ‘angel’ and ‘God’? I for one do not hesitate to say, He was none other than our Saviour; and we shall find the meaning of the whole incident unfolding itself in all its glory, if we recognise this principle of interpretation, if we regard Him with whom Jacob wrestled as none other than our own redeeming Lord.

But as to the wrestling, what was it? Physical or spiritual? It seems to have been both. The prophet Hosea says nothing as to a physical struggle. He says that Jacob wept, and made supplication to the angel. That is, according to the prophet, the pith of the whole matter; he wept, and made supplication, and so prevailed. He perceived, how we do not know, that his mysterious visitor was a superior being; this is evident from the fact that he desired to be blessed

by Him, and doubtless the less is blessed of the greater. Nay, why not suppose that Jacob, if he did not quite know, at least suspected, that He to whom he wept and made supplication was very God? Immediately the struggle is ended, he says, 'I have seen God face to face.' Surely he had heard how his great ancestor Abraham had seen God in human form; yes, and had wrestled with Him in prayer for Sodom. And he knew that Abraham's blessing had descended to him. Might not he also thus see God, and thus wrestle with Him, even as Abraham had done? He knew that He who had come to him in the darkness of that night of sorrow and anxiety *could* bless him, he desired to be blessed, he was determined to be blessed.

At first the blessing was, if not denied, delayed—he wept and made supplication, but he was tried for a time; the mysterious One would not bless him, would not speak the word that should assure Jacob of deliverance from his brother. With passionate entreaties Jacob persisted, and laid hold of Him whom he so besought when the day broke, and He whom Jacob held said, 'Let me go, for the day breaketh.' But no; Jacob grasped Him all the more firmly, and exclaimed, 'I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.'

A spiritual wrestling of weeping and supplication followed, as the blessing was not given by a literal physical struggle in which Jacob prevailed. He was generously permitted to prevail, as a father playing with his little child will allow himself to be conquered by him; for there is a sense in which an infant can conquer the strongest man. The relationship between father and child which exists between God and His servants, is inexhaustible in its illustrative wealth; it draws even from the father's gambols with his little ones, and from the little one's irresistible power over the father,—it draws, I say, illustrations of our power with God. There is not a father here who has a child five years old, but knows that the child has more power to influence and to subdue him and to lead him captive, than the strongest man in all the world has, or ever can have. And it is a most blessed thing to know that, with all our feebleness, we have this sort of power—this subtle, all-subduing strength of love with our Father who is in heaven.

Jacob conquered, or rather was allowed to conquer; but it was necessary that he should be thoroughly well convinced, that his conquest was by permission and not through his own strength. Without some intimation of this, he would pro-

bably be made proud and vain, and he might lose his sense of dependence upon God. His case was something like that of Paul, who, lest he should be lifted up above measure, by the abundance of the revelation granted him, had given to him a thorn in the flesh. So He with whom Jacob wrestled, touching or striking the hollow of his thigh and causing the sinew to shrink, so that ever afterwards it would seem he halted, or was in some measure lame, taught him that he was not equal with God, that his victory was of grace, not of merit, that it was the victory of human suffering and not of human strength.

And now what was the blessing that was granted to Jacob through his importunity and perseverance? It is probable that the blessing he most thought of, and most desired, was a promise and a pledge of deliverance from his brother Esau. But that was not exactly the form which the blessing took, though that was included in it. The man, the angel, the Divine One in human form, said to him, ‘What is thy name?’ Why did He ask the question, seeing He knew well the suppliant’s name? He asked it that He might obtain from him who thus besought his blessing, a confession of his sin. ‘My name is Jacob,’—Jacob the supplanter—a discreditable name—an evil name—he

had to acknowledge it. ‘I am a supplanter,—I am the man who had twice dealt subtilely and unjustly and cruelly with my brother and with my father,—I am the man who obtained the birthright by extortion, and the blessing by deceit.’ For in those times names meant something, not as afterwards, when, as Robertson remarks, ‘a man might bear the honoured name of Judas, which signifies “Praise,” and yet be a traitor.’ In the patriarchal age men were what they were called, and were called what they were, and a blush of shame would cross Jacob’s face as he said, ‘My name is the supplanter—the deceiver.’ But he makes a frank confession; he makes no attempt to struggle out of it by saying, ‘I am the son of Isaac, the grandson of Abraham.’ No, ‘I am Jacob.’ It is in one word his confession of sin! And then there is the blessing, a twofold blessing. ‘Thou shalt no more be called Jacob,—I take away from thee the name of evil meaning and evil memory—thou shalt no more be called a supplanter, a deceiver.’

Thus did the Saviour (for it is the Saviour who thus speaks) forgive all these sins;—the blotting out of the name was the blotting out of the iniquity which the name had commemorated: ‘Thy name shall no more be called Jacob’—that is part of the blessing, the forgiveness of sin. But

Israel is thy name henceforth ; Israel, a prince with God—‘for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.’ A prince with God, one of God’s princes—infinitely greater than any of the princes of this world.

A prince with God,—*power* with God,—that is the idea suggested by this new name of Israel,—power with God, and as we have seen, power with God in prayer. Not in personal merits, for, as regards that, he is Jacob the supplanter, the deceiver, the sinner; no, not power with God through any goodness of his, but simply through earnest, importunate prayer. Names then had a meaning, and indicated what men were, and this grand name Israel, the grandest one bestowed upon any human being, meant that Jacob had power—power with God, and therefore power with men, power over his brother Esau.

Blessed with that name he might now go forth to meet his brother, and had his brother brought with him, not four hundred but four thousand men in arms, he must have been subdued. With the new name of Israel, Jacob had nothing to fear. Thus, then, whatever might be the blessing that Jacob desired and wrestled for, the blessing given was two-fold :—the forgiveness of sin in the withdrawal of the name Jacob, and great honour and glory in

the bestowment of the name Israel ; and this is the blessing that Christ bestows upon all His people.

‘And Jacob asked Him, and said, Tell me, I pray Thee, Thy name ?’ Jacob’s curiosity was not gratified. The reply was, ‘Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after My name ?’

The mysterious One did not say, ‘I am an angel,’ or ‘I am a man,’ or ‘I am God.’ The time had not yet come for Christ to declare Himself. He blessed Jacob ; let Jacob be thankful and content, or let him, from what had taken place, infer for himself who it was that had wrestled with him, and allowed him to prevail. And Jacob did draw his inference, when he named the place Peniel, saying, ‘For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.’

It was a general belief that none could see God’s face and live ; God, indeed, expressly said as much to Moses. But in Christ that is possible, which out of Christ is impossible ; and thus it came to pass that Jacob saw God face to face, and lived nevertheless, for He whom he saw was Christ.

The whole narrative is suggestive of many reflections, to a few of which let me in conclusion briefly advert.

The character of Jacob, especially during the earlier portion of his life, is not one that we can

admire. His treatment, both of his father and of his brother, was not simply unjustifiable, it was vile and detestable ; and it is no excuse for him to say that he was influenced by his mother, for he was no longer a youth when he acted that deceitful part in obtaining the blessing. His subsequent life with Laban must not be judged of according to the standard of Christianity ; yet, contrasted with the lives of Abraham and Isaac, Jacob, with his two wives and two concubines, shows an inferiority of moral principle and a yielding to sensual passion that no allowance for the age he lived in can excuse.

In a household such as his, as afterwards in the household of David, there were so many jealousies, so many discordant elements, such an impossibility of training up the children aright, after such an example set by himself, that we do not marvel to find his sons the unruly, unfilial, and unbrotherly men that most of them became. And so the scoffs of scorners have often been cast against Jacob, or rather against revealed truth through Jacob, since Jacob is represented as one so highly favoured of God, while Esau, whom it is the fashion of such men to regard as the better man of the two, was so hardly dealt with. Now, perhaps Esau was the better man, and he had no need to be a very

excellent person in order to be the better man, but he was not hardly dealt with. He became in a worldly sense, at any rate, a greater man than Jacob, and in worldly greatness he had his reward, the only reward he cared for.

But now, as to Jacob's being so favoured, so honoured, so greatly blessed of God, although he was so faulty a man—would you have had it otherwise? Would you think the better of the Bible, could you gather as much hope and consolation from the Bible, if none but the best men were represented as favoured of God? Is there not in God's dealings with Jacob an illustration of that principle which alone can give any of us comfort,—which alone can enable us to look to the future with confidence,—the principle that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound? I am not thankful that Jacob was so bad a man, but since he was such, we should surely all be thankful to find that God treated him so mercifully. When we think of Abraham and his almost faultless life, when we think of Isaac and the piety and purity that seemed to have marked the whole of his career, we cannot derive much comfort from the fact that God was so good to them; but consider Jacob,—consider him in all his faultiness, the sins of his youth, and the sins of his maturer years,—and

when we find him forgiven and blessed, there is something to lay hold of,—something for the guiltiest to take as a ground of hope.

The event in Jacob's life which has formed the subject of our study this evening, is full of instruction. I have been at some pains to show that it reveals Christ to us,—Christ before His incarnation,—Christ so long ago visiting the world, appearing to His servants, conversing with them, helping them, blessing them; and it suggests to us, as probable if not certain, that all the old manifestations of God are manifestations of the well-beloved Son of God; that He who spoke to our first parents in the garden of Eden, and to Noah on Mount Ararat, and to Abraham on the plain of Mamre, and to Moses in Egypt, and to Joshua on the banks of Jordan, and to Samuel in the tabernacle, was He who afterwards was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us, and conversed with the apostles;—the Saviour of the world, from the beginning taking such interest in the world He came in due time to save.

Great, also, is the instruction, and great the encouragement in prayer, which this incident in Jacob's wrestling supplies. It is an Old Testament parable, teaching that men ought always to pray and not to faint. For, setting aside the idea of a

merely physical struggle, or confining it to the end of the conflict, when the stranger made as though he would depart, without granting the blessing desired and sought, the wrestling seems of a spiritual character: it seems the agony of fervent, earnest prayer; the prayer of one who would take no denial; the prayer of a sorrowing, anxious spirit that in darkness and solitude found God, and had the boldness of faith, the assurance that God must bless, if earnestly entreated.

Oh that we prayed as Jacob prayed!—should we not be blessed as he was blessed? Let this history rebuke the coldness and feebleness of our prayers, for really we ought to be both ashamed and alarmed, when we think of the spirit in which we often go to the throne of grace; asking many great blessings, but, to tell the honest truth, not caring very much whether they are granted or denied.

Once more I ask you to notice how the first verse of the text is worded: ‘There wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.’ It is not said that Jacob wrestled with the man, but that the man wrestled with him. It was a mutual struggle—Jacob wrestled with the Lord, and the Lord wrestled with Jacob. I know not exactly what this meant, or what this was in Jacob’s case;

but this I know, that the Lord wrestles with us, that Christ strives and struggles with us, with both saint and sinner,—strives to bless us far more than we strive to be blessed.

He wrestles with us by His Word ; He wrestles with us by His Spirit. Let us yield, and in our yielding we shall be made more than conquerors, for our greatest victory is to be conquered by Him.

IX.

LUCRE AND FILTHY LUCRE.

'Not for filthy lucre.'—1 PET. v. 2.

THE word *lucre* appears five times in the Bible, and in every case it bears a bad signification. We find it only once in the Old Testament, and then it is applied to the sons of Samuel, who 'walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment' (1 Sam. viii. 3). In the next place the word is used by Paul in the First Epistle to Timothy, where he says that a bishop must not be 'greedy of filthy lucre,' and again that deacons are to be free from the same fault. He repeats the warning in his Epistle to Titus; and Peter, in our text, provides the last sentence in which the word occurs in Scripture.

Now, it is remarkable that the warning against the love of lucre—of filthy lucre—is in all these cases intended for ministers of religion. The sons

of Samuel are scarcely an exception, for they were judges appointed to do right, and see right done, and to administer the law of God. The warning against the love of filthy lucre is addressed not to merchants, nor to any order of men occupied in trade or manufacture, but to bishops, deacons, elders, and to bishops, deacons, elders as such, whatever secular occupations they might be engaged in. This is a point to be borne in mind by the minister who undertakes to speak on the subject: he of all men is admonished against being given to the love of lucre. How comes it to pass that ministers of religion should be marked out for this word of caution? Perhaps even in the time of the apostles there were symptoms of this evil in the ministry of the church, and certainly in after times the evil became so great, so monstrous, that there was urgent need for condemnation stronger far than that expressed in the words of Peter and Paul.

But the word lucre is not in itself a word of evil signification. It simply means gain. No one objects to it when it appears in another form, and a business is spoken of as lucrative. I don't know that it means exclusively pecuniary gain. Certainly in two instances the word a few times translated lucre has not anything to do with

money. Paul, writing to the Philippians, enumerates his privileges and advantages as a Jew,—his Hebrew parentage, his zeal, his strict obedience to the law's commandments; and then we read, or might read, ‘But what things were lucre to me, these I counted loss for Jesus Christ.’ Again in the same Epistle he writes, ‘To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain,’ using exactly the word which in the text is translated lucre,—‘to me to die is lucre.’

Practically the distinction between lucre and filthy lucre has been lost;—a curious instance of the manner in which the world unintentionally accuses and condemns itself. How comes this word lucre to be understood only in an evil sense? Is it not because the world feels in its conscience that generally there is something bad in connection with gain? Let the world speak for itself, and it needs no other accuser: its speech bewrayeth it. Its craft becomes mere cunning; its censure turns into uncharitableness; its passion is only another word for sinful thoughts and feelings, and its retribution is nothing but revenge.

Now, I venture to draw a very marked distinction between lucre and filthy lucre.

Lucre is gain, and gain of all sorts, mental as well as material; and the love of lucre may be a

virtue and not a vice. No one is more greedy of lucre than a very studious man. But let us take the word in its commonest signification as money, material gain, gain in the form of money, or money's worth.

The loss of the distinction between lucre and filthy lucre has in some instances proved disadvantageous to the world's interest. Lucre and filthy lucre being confounded very much in the religious mind of the middle ages, there rose up an immense mass of mendicancy. Thousands and tens of thousands of young and able-bodied men, afraid, or professing to be afraid, lest the love of money should do them spiritual damage, bound themselves most solemnly to possess no property, either individually or in common, and to subsist entirely upon alms. These holy beggars swarmed all over Europe, and claimed a character for special sanctity because of their rags and wretchedness. Thus they withdrew themselves from all the useful wealth-producing conditions of life, and became a huge burden upon the credulous multitudes on whom they practised their imposture. I say imposture, for under that appearance of squalor and utter indigence the mendicant orders contrived to hide enormous wealth. They loudly denounced filthy lucre, and were all the

time laying up lucre as filthy as ever was made in the vilest occupations, and so they perverted the apostle's warnings upon this subject. I suppose that there is no doctrine or precept of Scripture that has not been abused and turned against itself.

There is lucre that is not filthy, but perfectly clean. The lucre that is made by honest labour and honest trading is nowhere condemned in the Word of God. The Word of God rather approves of it, and encourages men in the pursuit of it. In Old Testament times especially, God's blessing on a man generally took the form of temporal prosperity,—good harvests, abundance of flocks and herds. So God blessed Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job; so He promised to bless the people of Israel on condition that they should observe His commandments. Most distinctly, lucre was to be one of the rewards of keeping God's law. A man's moral and religious character does not necessarily suffer through the acquisition of lucre. Job, we are told, was the greatest man of the East.—he certainly was one of the best men, East or West.

A conscientious but timid man of old, named Agur, prayed that God would give him neither riches nor poverty; he was afraid of the demoralizing influence of either extreme. But a

far wiser and better man than Agur, namely, the Apostle Paul, far from all such fear, speaks thus : 'I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound ; everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.' The apostle felt that his religion was such as enabled him to set riches and poverty equally at defiance in regard to any demoralizing tendency. We very commonly say, and hear it said, and perhaps believe the saying, that great gain is injurious to character, that it makes men proud, that it hardens them in worldliness and greed, that it destroys their souls. I do not dispute this ; but, on the other hand, what is the effect of poverty ? Has it no demoralizing tendency ? Is it particularly favourable to godliness ? No ; but we have seen want in its terrible power tempt men to distrust God's wisdom, His kindness, His righteousness, His very existence. We have seen it lead men to be false and dishonest ; and it may be that, through the falsehood and dishonesty to which it tempts men, and all but drives them, poverty is as destructive to the soul as any amount of wealth. In fact, it seems to me to be a man's duty to obtain what lucre he honestly can, in order that he may escape the

awful temptations to wrong-doing which attend upon want.

Further, religious work is in a considerable measure sustained by lucre. I say, to a considerable extent, not wholly; for I cannot but believe that, were all Christian people as poor as Job in the day of his manifold calamities, they could and would maintain their Christian profession and find some way of doing good in their Master's name. But without lucre, without a tolerably large share of it, much of the religious work now being done, could not be carried on, much of it indeed could never have been undertaken. I do not in the least believe that the work of the Christian Church depends upon its being established and endowed by the State,—if it do, then so much the worse for the Church,—but the work of the Church does in a measure depend upon its being generously supported by those who are able as well as willing to support it. The riches of lucre enable a man to be rich in good works; and so the quest of lucre becomes a matter of religious duty, because its result leads to a man's greater power of usefulness.

Of lucre, then, I would say, desire it, toil for it, obtain what you can of it in honest and honourable ways. Don't be afraid of its demoralizing tendency;

the grace of God is all-sufficient. The demoralizing tendency of want is quite as great. Money is power to do good, to gladden many poor men's hearts and homes, to augment largely the sum of human happiness, of which happiness the cheerful giver is certain to have his share. If it be a Christian duty to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to shelter the homeless, to minister to the sick, to rescue the perishing, it is not enough to say, by way of excuse for not doing such things, that we have not the means. Such an excuse brings up the question, How is it, why is it, that you have not the means? Have you tried to obtain the means? Have you been diligent and thrifty over and above your own wants, that you might give to him that is in need? It may be that, while some will be condemned for having been too greedy of gain, others will be as severely condemned for their negligence in not seeking to gain what would have enabled them to do good. Yes, work and get gain. May the time soon come when there shall be plenty of work, and of remunerative work for all! And may what is gained be thankfully received and rightly used, and so lucre will be a blessing to us and make us a blessing to others.

But filthy lucre is quite another thing. Filthy

lucre is gain gotten in dishonest and dishonourable ways ; by violence, by fraud, by falsehood, by misrepresentation, by taking unfair and cruel advantage of the ignorance or the necessity of our neighbour. How much of this goes on it is not for me to pronounce ; but while not assenting to the proverb, that what everybody says must be true, still, when almost every one you meet with speaks of the atrocious dishonesty practised in business, there must be some truth at the foundation of such statements. I confess that there are many things, not understanding which I should not venture to purchase lest I should be imposed upon ; and therefore, unless I know something of the folk I shall have to deal with, I forego my purchase, and do without what I might wish for, because of the probability of my getting an inferior article, or having to pay an exorbitant price. In almost every branch one has to be cautious ; and, pray, why is there need for so much caution ? Just because there is so much dishonesty, so much eager hunger and thirst for filthy lucre, for unrighteous and unjust gain.

It is to the great discredit of many professedly religious people that they are in these matters no more to be trusted than the most worldly of worldlings. When you have wanted something,

and have asked where you could get it best in quality and most reasonable in price, were you ever told to go to Mr. This or Mr. That, on the ground that he, being a very religious man, would serve you honestly and in all respects well? Such advice may be given, but I think rarely; and, if taken, it is perhaps more rarely still found to be wise.

And the lucre that is filthy, through being gained in evil ways, cannot be clean through spending it liberally and piously. There have been many attempts of this sort; of the plunder taken in war, of the wealth amassed through the possession of slaves, of the fortunes made through fraud and deceit in their innumerable forms, much has been given to religious objects,—given, in thousands of cases, by way of making atonement for evil-doing. But God says, ‘I hate robbery for burnt-offering.’ He will graciously accept lucre, but will refuse with indignation filthy lucre.

↳ Lucre is filthy when gained wrongly, and becomes filthy, however honestly made, when wrongly used; when self and selfish indulgence is a man’s great aim and object; when it is applied to purposes of corruption, oppression, injustice, profligacy; when it is withheld from those good works which it ought to encourage and to help;

when a man makes it his idol, and worships it as his god ; in such cases it is defiled and defiling. And such cases are so common, that we cannot wonder that in Scripture the word is nowhere used excepting in a bad sense.

And so it is not enough for a man to be able to say : My gain is not filthy lucre, because I have obtained every farthing of it by means utterly and absolutely honest. There is the further question : What have you done with it ? what *are* you doing with it ? Are you using it as a Christian man should use it ?—in providing well for those of your own house ; in giving of it to the needy for the relief of their wants ; in promoting in these ways the welfare of man and the glory of God.

If the lucre, little or much, that we have gained or are gaining be gained by honest means, and is therefore clean, let us keep it clean by using it as our conscience and the principles of our religion direct.

And of our lucre, be it little or much, we shall have to give account to God. It will be part of the business of the day of judgment to discover and to show how this lucre has been gotten, and how it has been spent. Rightly obtained, it is one of God's gifts ; but rightly or wrongly obtained, it will be brought into the judgment of the great day,

when God will bring into judgment every work,
whether it be good or evil.

Let lucre be always looked at in this light, and
by God's grace it will do us no harm ; it will be
honourably acquired, it will be beneficently used,
it will be sincerely enjoyed. / My !

X.

JACOB'S ANSWER TO PHARAOH.

'And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou? And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.'—GEN. xlvii. 8, 9.

MANY commentators speak of Jacob's answer to Pharaoh's question with approval and admiration, as expressive of a very just and pious reflection upon his life, and upon life in general. These writers would have us all say that our days have been few and evil; they would have us all take the melancholy view of our lives which Jacob here takes of his.

Now, I must say that I can see nothing to admire, nothing to approve, in what Jacob said to Pharaoh. On the contrary, it appears to me that in his answer to Pharaoh the patriarch was guilty of the most shameful ingratitude to God. Here is a man, obviously so old as to cause Pharaoh great surprise, obviously far older than most men of his

time; and yet he says that his days have been few, and he grumbles that he has not attained to the age of his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham, although he really could not tell that he might not live longer than either of them had lived. Much is made by some worthy expositors of the fact that Jacob speaks of his life as a pilgrimage. They tell us that the word indicates Jacob's recognition of the fact that he was a stranger here, looking forward with pious expectation to an eternal home in heaven. But we have no proof that he attached any such idea to the word pilgrimage. It seems much more probable that, in calling his life a pilgrimage, he spoke with reference to his having led a wandering life—an all but necessary condition of existence in the case of a man whose wealth consisted in cattle, who must go from place to place with his enormous flocks and herds in order that they might find pasture. There is no piety in this word pilgrimage ; it is nothing more than just the right word to describe the life of a great oriental grazier such as Jacob was.

If we could suppose that, in speaking of his days and his years as few and evil, he intended to confess his own faults and failings, he was quite right in using such a word ; but it is very certain that Jacob was not making to Pharaoh any con-

fession of sin. He uses the word evil, not in its moral signification, but rather in its physical sense. He does not mean sin ; he only means trouble. He remembers how Esau had threatened him, how Laban had deceived him, how his wives and his concubines had wrangled and quarrelled, how his sons had misbehaved, how he had mourned over the loss of his beloved Rachel, how he had been in despair about his dear son Joseph, and how at last the famine in his own country had brought him low and made him poor ; and so he says, ‘The days of my years have been evil.’

It is sad to see an aged man so ungrateful, so utterly forgetful of all the good that his God had bestowed upon him, and so unmindful also of those sins which he had committed, and which deserved far more punishment than all these troubles. He had most cruelly deceived his father, most shamefully defrauded his brother, and yet God had been merciful to him ; God had prospered him and given him great wealth. And as to the evil which continually was mingled with the good in Jacob's life, he ought to have remembered that very much of it was the result of his own folly and vice.

Take it altogether, and I think that if you pronounce a candid opinion, it will be to this effect, that Jacob's answer to Pharaoh's question is

not at all to his credit. It is the answer of a disappointed, peevish, ungrateful man, who had seen the light of more than a hundred summers, had been sheltered from the storms of more than a hundred winters, had eaten the bread of more than a hundred harvests, and drunk the wine of more than a hundred vintages ; his deeply-injured brother had publicly forgiven him ; he had found his long-lost son, and found him ruler over all the land of Egypt ; but more than all, he held in his possession the great promise, that in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed ; and yet all that he has to say is, that his days have been few and evil, and there is not the slightest sign of thankfulness to God.

I daresay it was the miserable life he felt it to have been, but he had made it such himself. Indeed, it seems to have been a very selfish life, hard and ungenerous in the extreme. What could be expected of one who began by bargaining for his famishing brother's birthright for that mess of pottage ? A selfish life, and a useless life, for we can find in it no one act of beneficence. His wives were idolaters, and he does not seem to have cared to convert even them to the service of the true God. And certainly Jacob did nothing to commend his God and his religion to Pharaoh, when

all he could say was that his life had been one of great wretchedness. Not without reason might Pharaoh say, ‘Well, if this be the experience of those who worship the God of Abraham, I would rather keep to my own religion.’

Now, there is in human nature much of the discontent and the ingratitude which we discover in these words addressed by Jacob to the king of Egypt. Like Jacob, many complain that their days are few and evil, not considering how inconsistent such complaining is,—I mean inconsistent with itself, for if our days be evil, then why complain that they are few? If they be evil, the fewer they are the better. There may be some sense in complaining that life is short, or in complaining that it is miserable; but the one complaint should certainly stop the other, and, feeling life to be full of trouble, you ought to be very thankful that it is so brief.

Considering what most lives are, they are perhaps quite long enough, long enough for our own interest, and long enough for the comfort of our friends, and quite long enough for the welfare of society. So seldom do people give signs of great improvement either in mind or morals, that, to prevent their becoming perfect monsters of wickedness, it is a very wise and merciful law that

limits human life to its present bounds. Indeed, from some statements of Scripture, it may be inferred that the exceeding great growth of iniquity which marked the centuries of patriarchal life, led to such an abridgment of man's existence as we now experience, and I think it must be admitted that there was far more of love and mercy than of hatred and anger in such a dispensation. The state of the world is bad enough now, but it must have been far worse when men lived on in sin for well-nigh a thousand years. Is it any wonder that God saw the wickedness of man, that it was very great upon the earth, and that every imagination of his heart was only evil continually? It was time to reduce the limits of man's life, when of his life he made so vile a use.

Our days are few, and yet they are more than we know well what to do with, and hence the necessity which some people feel of killing time, because it hangs so heavily, so wearisomely, upon their hands; they must while it away, adopt means whereby, fast as it goes, it shall at any rate seem to go still faster. Much of our light reading and many of our amusements are indulged in with this view, to enable us to pass the time without an intolerable feeling of tediousness, and then, when we have killed the hours and the days, we are

astonished, and marvel that the years appear so short. Well, I suppose that if a man could sleep soundly from New Year's Day to New Year's Eve, the year would appear to be no more than a moment ; and in proportion as either want of brains, want of money, or want of occupation, reduces us towards that condition of mental inaction, the years do seem to glide by with wonderful rapidity.

I believe it to be a fact, yet I cannot say that I quite understand it, that when the hours are longest, the years are shortest. One seldom hears reference to the very rapid flight of time from those, all whose hours are so fully occupied that the memory gets enriched with thousands of recollections, which in due course fill up the year. The hours seem shortest, but the years longest, to the man whose mind is most actively and arduously employed. I think, then, that the necessity for the active and even arduous effort of the mind is a real blessing ; it does not actually lengthen life, but it causes us to feel life as though far longer than it is felt to be when spent in indolence. People who dream away their lives in doing nothing are likely to feel that life is but a dream ; people who don't try to put something into every day, some thought, some word, some deed that shall distinguish it from others, are likely to feel

that all the days of a year are just huddled up together, and seem to be almost as nothing.

It is not right to complain that our days are few ; at any rate it is not right so to complain if we are not making the most and the best of them ; but still worse is it to complain that our days are evil. If they be evil in a moral sense,—that is to say, if they be sinful,—that is no matter for complaint, but it is matter for sorrow and shame, for confession, repentance, amendment. But using the word as Jacob used it,—that is to say, as signifying trouble,—it is very wrong to complain that our days have been evil. A man may say, ‘ Well, sir, but it is the fact ; my life has been, and is, full of trouble and misery.’ My friend, if such be the case, I am sorry for you ; but now, to be honest about the matter, just consider how much of that trouble and misery you have brought upon yourself by your own foolishness, or by something worse than foolishness. I tell you that I have had far too large an acquaintance with people in trouble, lightly to believe that it is seldom the man’s own fault that he is afflicted. I find that, in most cases, the evil is evil that might have been, if not altogether escaped, very much lessened, but for the downright wickedness of the person who suffers. But admitting not only the existence and the alleged extent

of the evil that this man has had to endure, admitting also that he is not to blame, that he has not brought the evil upon himself, it is surely a base and shocking thing for a man to take up Jacob's words, and pronounce his whole life evil. What, are you indeed such a miserable being ? Has there been no sunshine on all your path, no happiness, no comfort ? If you were a slave, perhaps you might speak thus of your life ; if you were subject to continual pain, you might think thus of your life ; but I don't think there is a man on the face of the earth, who, blessed with liberty and health, has a right to speak of his life, of his entire life, in such gloomy, disparaging, and unthankful terms.

And yet probably there are many good Christian people who deem it right and pious so to think and so to speak of life. When with Jacob a man says, 'Few and evil have the days and the years of my life been,' he is supposed to discover an unworldly and highly spiritual frame of mind. It seems to me that a man by such language rather indicates that he is forgetful of, and unthankful for, all God's mercies ; and further, that he calls in question, that he denies the wisdom, the might, and the love of God ; for his language implies that God does not govern the world as well as it might be governed.

Instead of piety, I see profaneness in this way of

speaking of this precious gift of life which God has bestowed upon us. What would you think of some mendicant who, deserving of nothing, but to be sent to gaol and flogged there, should nevertheless receive from you a loaf of bread, and should contemptuously and complainingly say, that both in quantity and quality it was not what it might and ought to have been. And the man, whether he be the patriarch Jacob or any one else, who talks of his days as few and evil, finds fault with the quantity and quality of a good gift which he does not in the least deserve, but which God has in mercy conferred upon him. Oh, shameful, monstrous ingratitude, that thus slanders the Giver of all good ! Let no such complainings, such unseemly complainings, and I will add, such sinful complainings, ever fall from our lips. Rather than say with that discontented old patriarch, 'Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been,' let us say with David, 'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.'

Whatever excuse may be made for him who has no Christian faith, believers in Jesus Christ are certainly quite without excuse in giving way to the melancholy and ungrateful spirit indicated by Jacob's answer to Pharaoh's question. The worldly, sinful man who finds the world a disappointment,

may speak of his days as few and evil ; but the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, received into a man's heart and practised in his life, will soon drive away these vapours of discontent. Oh that all men did but know the power of the gospel to correct, to dispel all those jaundiced views of life in which men seem to see not only through a glass darkly, but through a smoked glass all the more darkly. There are dismal people who, having by their own foolishness and wickedness brought sorrow on themselves, rail at the world and at life in the world ; and there are dismal Christians who, more for form's sake than anything else, think it the proper thing to speak of life as though it were some curse from the devil, and not a blessing from God ; and there are dismal preachers who deem it a proof of orthodoxy, to insist upon the wretchedness of all things here below ; and there are dismal religious poets who write doleful and horrible hymns about this waste howling wilderness, and the desirableness of getting out of it,—and thus all these creatures take up old Jacob's words, ‘ Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.’ But ever, in proportion as men come to know and experience the truth as it is in Jesus, this discontent and unthankfulness give place to gratitude and praise.

In several ways Christianity, believed in, accepted, and really lived and practised, tends to this more just and more cheerful estimate of the present life. The religion of Jesus Christ teaches us to think very humbly of ourselves and of our deserts ; it reveals to us our sinfulness and great unworthiness ; it brings home to the conscience those words of the psalmist, ‘If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand ?’ He who is brought to this state of mind—this very right state of mind—cannot but be impressed with the immensity of the divine goodness, and with the fact that he himself is not dealt with according to his sins, nor rewarded according to his iniquities. ‘More than I deserve,’ is the judgment he pronounces upon all the joys of life ;—‘less than I deserve,’ is what he says concerning all its sorrows. The religion of Jesus Christ teaches us to exercise a fine, strong, manly self-denial in regard to the world and the things of the world. It does not require a man to be an ascetic, but it certainly saves a man from being a sybarite, devoted to effeminate luxury, and unable to live in comfort without every sort of indulgence. On the contrary, it encourages a spirit of contentment, it induces habits of prudence and economy, it reconciles a man to the inconvenience that may be

inseparable from his lot in life, and it checks, if it do not destroy, that envy of another's better fortune which is to so large an extent a source of the unhappiness which leads men to speak of their days as few and evil.

Further, true Christianity brings very forcibly to mind, that if our days be few and evil, those of our dear Lord were fewer and more evil still. Is it not enough that the disciple should be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord ? The poverty to which our Saviour submitted has served a very blessed purpose. I cannot but think that His example has enabled multitudes of afflicted people to bear their afflictions patiently. His sufferings have done much to teach quiet lessons of resignation to the will of God ; and I doubt not that we are all of us something more patient and resigned, in consequence of His patience and resignation.

And Christianity is a religion full of sympathy. It not only teaches us, it disposes us, makes it a law and a necessity of our moral being, to rejoice with them who do rejoice, and to weep with them who weep. Consequently we are led to visit, to think of, to pity those who are in grievous trouble, and we cannot do this without meeting with many cases of sorrow far more sorrowful than our own ; and thus, seeing how much less tried we are, how

much the Lord gives to us that He has withheld from others, we feel that it were a shameless and sinful piece of ingratitude to God to speak of our days as evil.

Another help which Christianity affords us in driving away these sinful and melancholy thoughts is this, the assurance which it gives us that all things work together for good to them that love God. Guarding this Christian optimism from the abuse that would make us utterly reckless, it is a very blessed consolation to be able to feel that such evils as we have not brought upon ourselves by foolishness and sin will not be permitted in the end to injure us, but will really turn to our advantage. And the gospel of Jesus Christ, if honoured, believed, obeyed, is very sure to lead a man into such paths as will be safe from most of the mistakes and the sins that cause men petulantly to say, ‘Few and evil have been the days of my pilgrimage.’

Jacob's days were not few, considered with reference to the average duration of life, even in his own time; but if they were evil, who wonders? His days were evil because he himself was evil. In righteous retribution, his old age was made to punish the sins of his youth. As he had sown, so he reaped; and I do not hesitate to say that it is

sin, yes sin, always sin, that, at last finding a man out and punishing him, leads him to say, ‘Few and evil have been the days of my pilgrimage.’ Lead Christian lives, lives of sobriety and purity, lives of diligence and thrift, lives of truthfulness and honour, lives of generosity and usefulness, lives of prayer and praise, and you will never whine about the fewness and the evil of your days.

And once more, the gospel of Jesus Christ gives to the word pilgrimage more meaning than Jacob probably intended ; gives it all the meaning that has been assigned to it, as indicative, not of a mere uncertain wandering to and fro without purpose and without a prospect of anything better. To the word pilgrimage the gospel of Christ gives this fine meaning, viz. that it is a journey to a certain well-defined end, that this life is a passage to another which shall be sinless and everlasting, and in which there shall be nothing to cause trouble or sorrow. And the inference from this, indeed the natural consequence of this, is that, just as on a journey by land or by sea, a sensible and not querulous man endures uncomplainingly many a discomfort, cheered by the prospect of soon being at home, so believers in Christ, as strangers and pilgrims on the earth, feel that it were a foolish and unmanly thing to be greatly put out of the

way by small annoyances upon their long life's journey ; and by the recompense of reward which they expect, they are taught in patience to possess their souls.

And so I would say, if we have fallen at all into the habit of regarding life as Jacob seems to have regarded it, let us break ourselves off from a habit so ungrateful, so unreasonable, and so profane. Instead of considering it the proper and pious thing to find fault with God's dispensations, let us recognise the unjust and ungracious nature of such reflections upon Him who doeth all things well. Shakespeare brings before us a man whose whole life had been darkened by a great crime, and who says in his misery and despair—

'Life's but a walking shadow ; a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more : it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.'

And life is indeed in many instances no more than that. But let us not take these awful words as descriptive of life in general. Life need not be, ought not to be, a tale told by an idiot. It may be something very different from that ;—a tale of wisdom and virtue, full of goodness, usefulness, happiness, signifying much in its results to the man who lives it, and to all who come within the

range of his influence. Let Macbeth speak for himself; but those who have made their own lives bad and wicked, are not the men to pronounce a just opinion upon the lives of others who desire and strive to do right in the sight of God and man.

XI.

‘COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE,
SAITH YOUR GOD.’

ISAIAH xl. 1.

JUST here, at the end of the thirty-ninth chapter and the beginning of the fortieth, the book of the prophet Isaiah is divided into two parts. In the previous chapters we find a large variety of prophetic utterances relating to the Jews and to the nations round about them. But now we have one grand prophecy which, beginning with this verse, extends to the end of the book, and the subject of this great prophecy is Christ. These chapters are called the Gospel according to Isaiah, and, regarded in this light, how finely and befittingly does the prophecy begin with the words, ‘Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God’! And if you read on, you find consolation upon consolation, as the prophet describes the person, the character, the work, and the kingdom of Christ. These chapters, twenty-seven in number,

form the most glorious part of the Old Testament, for the obvious reason that they excel all other parts of the Old Testament in the announcement of evangelical truth.

Upon these words I propose to make some observations concerning the duty of comforting the people of God.

I. And first let us notice that God has a people. There is a sense in which ‘all people that on earth do dwell’ are God’s; but when in Scripture we read, as we so very often do, of the people of God, the expression must be taken in a limited sense. God’s people are those who know Him, believe in Him, serve Him, and love Him. In very ancient times the people of God consisted of no more than one family, the family of Abraham. Then it expanded into the Israelitish nation, and this is the meaning which the phrase generally bears in the Old Testament. A further expansion which should include men of other nations, though very plainly foretold by the prophets, and especially by Isaiah in the chapters that follow our text, was a thing quite unexpected by the Jews in our Lord’s time; and when He showed kindness towards Gentiles, His fellow-countrymen were greatly displeased. Even the apostles did not understand

the taking of the Gentiles into fellowship with the people of God. It was not until specially instructed by a vision from heaven, that Peter saw it to be his duty to preach the gospel to the heathen world ; and I think that Paul was the only apostle who entered right heartily and gladly into that work, counting it the chief honour of his ministry that he was the apostle of the Gentiles, and the chief glory of the gospel that it invited all the world to become the people of God.

Who, then, are God's people at the present time ? All Christian people are the people of God ; and all others are by the gospel invited and urged, through faith in Christ, to join themselves to the people of God. And the people of God are widely scattered over the world ; they belong to all nations and all countries. They acknowledge God as their sovereign and are loyal to Him, doing, and endeavouring to do, His will, and to render to Him the service, the worship, the honour that are due to Him. They have had a strange and eventful history, from the days of Abraham through all the centuries that have since elapsed. They have often been very faithless ; they have merited and received much rebuke and punishment for their sins ; they have at some periods and in many places been hated and persecuted by the world ;

and, worse still, they have in not a few instances hated and persecuted one another. Still in one unbroken line this people has existed through all these ages, and is at the present more numerous than at any previous time. And for this people a wonderful future is foretold: they are still to increase in number, and still to meet with more or less of opposition, until their Lord shall come and take them to Himself, that where He is, there they shall be also.

II. Much more, very much more, might be said upon this well-known expression, ‘The people of God,’ but we must adhere to our topic. From the text we infer that God’s people stand in need of consolation. They are spoken of as an afflicted people, and therefore is given this command to comfort them. There have been times when the entire people of God have been afflicted: as, for instance, when they were slaves in Egypt; when they were wanderers in the wilderness of Sinai; when they were captives in Babylonia; when they were persecuted by Jewish priests and Gentile rulers. And at all times there are some of God’s people who stand in need of consolation. No marked exception is made in their favour to protect them from the ordinary trials and troubles

of life. Poverty, sickness, bereavement visit them in common with others; and there are sorrows, fears, anxieties that are peculiarly their own, and of which others have little or nothing,—sorrow for sin, for their own sin, and for the sin that they see around them; the fear that they may themselves fall away; anxiety for many dear to them who are unconverted and remain indifferent or averse to religion. In their own spiritual state there may be much to cause dissatisfaction and pain; the weakness of their faith, the coldness of their love, the manifold imperfections of all their Christian life and Christian work. And then in the Church they witness much that is discouraging: so much superstition, so much unbelief; here, a foolish multiplication of services; there, a giving up of great and glorious truths: and there is selfishness inflaming zeal, and zeal setting charity at nought. Beyond the Church again, in the world there is so much utter ungodliness, and so much misery consequent thereupon, ignorance and vice and crime abounding in all directions.

The people of God have a moral sensitiveness that cannot but cause them much pain, which may not at all be felt by those who are not God's people. Their standard of life and character and duty is very high, and they are deeply concerned

that they have not attained to it. Other men may think very well of themselves, and believe that they are almost faultless ; but in the case of the people of God, unless they be infatuated by some strange doctrine of perfection, conscience is constantly reproving them, and they ever feel that they fall far short of what they ought to be.

And their sympathies are broad. Other men may not, perhaps, care what the condition of the world is so long as they themselves are prosperous ; but the people of God have been taught to feel the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and cannot without sorrow and concern behold their fellow-men living in rebellion against God, in contempt of Christ, and in danger of everlasting destruction.

They need consolation ; and it is the will and the command of God that consolation should be given to them. ‘Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.’ To make it more emphatic, the command is given twice. Let every Christian teacher notice this, and learn the lesson that it teaches him. For ministers of religion are too prone to find fault, and to utter rebuke and condemnation ; and God’s people often leave His house, feeling that not a word has been said to console them, while much has been said to dishearten them, to make them anxious, and it may

be to make them angry. With more of consolation, I believe many Christians would be much better Christians than they are. I remember that when I was at school my teachers did little else than find fault with me, rebuke me, scold me, punish me. Probably I deserved it, but it had a bad effect upon me. A word of praise and encouragement, a word expressive of no more than the most moderate approval of something I had done, would have made me a much more obedient and diligent scholar. It is right to be faithful; but there are some people, some ministers, whose idea of faithfulness is only this,—faithfulness in administering rebuke, in exposing faults, in denouncing sins, in telling people how bad they are.

But faithfulness, as I understand it, Christian faithfulness, and faithfulness on the part of a Christian teacher, is faithfulness to the whole counsel of God, and therefore faithfulness in the administration of comfort to God's people. If I hold back from you the consolations of the gospel, I am as unfaithful as if I hold back its warnings and reproofs. No! Faithful dealings with men's souls means the giving to them of all that God has provided for them, and what He has provided for them is, chiefly, not rebuke, but consolation.

The word 'to comfort' literally means to

strengthen. We connect with it the idea of consoling rather than that of strengthening, but the two ideas are intimately related. Consolation is strength. Give a good man encouragement, and he is all the stronger for it, and goes on in the path of duty all the more steadily and courageously. A man when cheerful can and will do much that he neither will nor can do when dejected. And we ought to do all that is in our power to make the people of God cheerful, to keep their hearts and spirits up. Their consciences will generally do all that is needful in the way of administering rebuke, and the trials of life will be quite enough to make them sorrowful. Be it ours to speak the words that help and heal and comfort.

And I do not know that there is a better way of impressing the careless, the unconverted, the utterly ungodly, than to let them see and know as much as possible of the consolations and the joys that pertain to the people of God. If I wanted to reform an idle, dissolute fellow who was ruining himself, I might ask him to accompany me to the wretched, squalid, filthy abode of some one who had about completed his work of destroying himself and all belonging to him; or I might take him to the bright, peaceful, joyous, healthy home of some sober, thrifty neighbour. Perhaps neither method

would produce much impression, but I think, of the two, the latter would be the more likely to have a good effect. At any rate, it would be well to try this plan as well as the other. And so for spiritual good, while it is well to warn the unconverted, to tell them of the wrath to come, that the wages of sin is death, and the way of transgressors hard, to speak to them of God's hatred of sin, and of the punishment of sin as declared in God's Word, it is also well, and quite as well, to set before the unconverted the blessedness of which they are depriving themselves through their unbelief and sin. I should expect more conversions as the result of a course of sermons or addresses on the privileges of saints, than from twice the number of discourses upon the miseries and the perils of sinners. And the more we comfort the people of God, the more likely we are to kindle a desire in the hearts of others to join themselves to His people.

III. God says, 'Comfort ye My people;' and there is comfort for them. The gospel by its very name declares this, and the more it is studied, believed, practised, the more is it found to deserve its name of Good Tidings. The gospel, although it does contain the saddest of all narratives, is the most cheering and joyous of all books, and is so

just because of that sad narrative. For the sufferings and the death of Jesus Christ are the source of all the gladness which the gospel inspires. It is not a book that will make us laugh ; it may make us weep ; but it will also make our hearts to sing for joy. In these few pages, for few they are, there is more comfort than in all other books that ever were written. Strange it may seem, strange it undoubtedly is, that, whether the gospel be fact or fiction, it has given more consolation to the minds and hearts and consciences of men than they can find in all other literature. It were well for the sceptic to consider this, and explain it.

Well, there is no difficulty in finding the comfort that is intended for the people of God. God has given it us in the gospel. There is the comfort of forgiveness. If any of God's people be cast down and anxious by reason of a consciousness of sin, we can comfort them with the assurance, often repeated in various forms, of the forgiveness of all trespasses, forgiveness through the blood of Christ, forgiveness according to the exceeding riches of His grace.

There is the comfort of acceptance with God. If any of His people, in their sense of extreme unworthiness and utter imperfection, feel afraid that God will not receive them, we can tell them that

Christ is their righteousness ; that it is not on their own merits but on His that they are to stand before God ; that His righteousness is unto and upon all them that believe.

There is the comfort of holiness. If any of God's people are dismayed because they find so much evil in their hearts, and so little power to cope with it and overcome it, we can tell them of the Holy Spirit ; of strength through that Spirit in the inner man ; of that Spirit's power to cleanse and sanctify the soul, and to enable us to perfect holiness in the fear of God.

There is the comfort of adoption. If any of God's people be anxious as to the future, taking fearful thought for the morrow, we can tell them that they are not only God's people, but his children ; and that He is not only their King to govern them, but their Father to provide for them.

There is the comfort of eternal life. If any of God's people be in distress and fear in the prospect of death, we can tell them of Christ and of life in Him, everlasting life, blessed and glorious life in Him, and as His free gift to every one that believes on Him.

There is comfort for the people of God in their sufferings. We can tell them that these sufferings are for the trial of their faith ; that they are all permitted in wisdom and mercy ; that they are

working together for good ; that they are a part of that discipline and education that God sees to be best for His dearly beloved children.

There is comfort for the people of God in their Christian work. We can assure them that their labour is not in vain in the Lord ; that if they be not reaping, they are sowing what they or others shall in due season reap.

There is a comfort for the people of God in all their secular work. For we can tell them that whatever they do they may do to the glory of God, and that God is well pleased not only with service that is professedly done for Him, and in connection with His name and kingdom, but well pleased also with all the diligence, honesty, uprightness, cheerfulness, patience brought into exercise in a Christian man's daily calling.

And I might speak of the comfort of prayer,—in everything making our requests known unto God ; and the comfort of praise,—singing in our hearts unto the Lord ; and the comfort of religious meditation, with all the blessed thoughts and feelings which it inspires ; and the comfort of Christian fellowship, with all its kindness and affection ; and the comfort of trying to do good, and to live a pure, useful, noble life ; and the comfort of hope in regard to those who die in the

Lord. The consolation is boundless. It does not leave a single sorrow unassuaged ; it has a balm for every wound, a cordial for every fear. There is no darkness which it cannot irradiate with light, no evil out of which it cannot extract good. Such is the comfort which God in Christ has provided for His people.

IV. And now, as to the administration of it.—The command is given, we may suppose, to the ministers of religion. Isaiah himself set a grand example when he wrote those chapters that so abound with consolation. And we have a finer example still in our Lord Jesus Christ, one great part of whose office was to comfort all that mourn, and to bind up the broken-hearted. We can find in His teaching words of rebuke and words of warning, stern rebuke and solemn warning ; but, chiefly, we find words of consolation,—gracious, loving consolation for all who went to Him in need of it. If men went to Him simply with the intent to cavil, to oppose, to put cunning questions, they received what they most needed, — some sharp word of censure, or some sorrowful word of regret for the hardness of their hearts ; but when the heart was contrite, meek, anxious and sad, the Lord never failed to prove Himself a comforter.

What ample comfort there is in His parables!—comfort for the sinner in the parable of the lost sheep; comfort for the backslider in the parable of the prodigal son; comfort for the inquirer in the parable of the pearl of great price; comfort for the Christian worker in the parables of the talents and the pounds.

At the close of His ministry His disciples were still very ignorant, very worldly-minded, very faulty in many ways; but He spent His last evening with them, not in rebuking them, though they well deserved to be rebuked, but in comforting them with the divinest words of consolation that ever fell even from His lips.

We have another example in St. Paul. If in his Epistles we find him reproving some of the churches for their many shortcomings, we find him far more frequently writing words calculated to cheer them and make them glad;—comforting them, as he says, with the comfort wherewith he was himself comforted of God.

As a minister of the gospel I ought to follow such examples. I fear that I have not done so as largely as I ought. The severe aspects of truth have perhaps been too exclusively preached in my ministry, as I have talked of duty and sin, of profession and practice, of this imperfection and

of that in Christian character and conduct. It is time, it is high time, that it were more deeply impressed upon my mind and heart that I am charged with the far happier duty of comforting the people of God.

But the people of God may comfort themselves. Happily for them the gospel is not ours alone, it is theirs also. And if God's people made more use of it, read it more, meditated upon it more, prayed over it more, they would be far more cheerful than many of them are. They may comfort themselves, and they may comfort one another. Let there be less of fault-finding, less criticising of one another's character and conduct ; let there be more brotherly kindness and co-operation in Christian work and Christian worship. Oh, of what consolation and joy a Christian congregation may be the scene, if only those who compose it strengthen each other's hearts and hands, rejoicing with them that do rejoice and weeping with them that weep ; extending help where help is needed, speaking words of encouragement to the young, heartily recognising and supporting all service, however lowly, that is done for Christ.

The Lord tells me to comfort His people. Well, just one word more. I don't believe that it is possible to comfort His people if His people will

not earnestly and actively labour for Him. A man has reason to thank God if He have so constituted him that idleness is just unutterable misery to him. I wish we all felt this in regard to spiritual things, and I believe it is so far felt, that those Christians who do least for God have least comfort from God. If any of my hearers are sighing and longing for more Christian consolation, I know that I am not free from blame ; yet if the gospel is but little comfort to you, ask yourself whether you are giving yourself that spiritual exercise upon which spiritual health and happiness so much depend. As long as a man is spiritually indolent, I can easily imagine the gospel to be not a comfort to him, but a great discomfort, because it reproves him, it gives him very much reason to fear that he is not one of God's people. Jesus, always going about doing good, reproves him ; Paul, labouring with body and mind to save men, reproves him ; all the Christians of the apostolic age, abounding in the work of the Lord, reprove him. My friend, there is really only one way by which you can realize to the full the consolations of the gospel : *live* the gospel ; and Christian work will make Christian truth a source of endless comfort to your soul.

XII.

CARNAL WEAPONS.

'For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal.'—2 COR. x. 4.

IN the text and in the context, St. Paul speaks of a warfare in which he was engaged, and of the weapons by means of which that warfare was carried on. The warfare and the weapons, therefore, form the subject of remarks which I desire now to lay before you.

And first, concerning the warfare of which the apostle speaks.

Of the New Testament writers, I think that Paul alone is in the habit of illustrating Christian life and work by figures of speech drawn from the life and work of a soldier. Perhaps the highly combative nature of his own mind, and the fact that in his travels he saw so much of military men, together with the strong opposition which he everywhere encountered in preaching the gospel, led him into this manner of setting forth Christian truths. At

any rate, we find that in many of his writings the allusions to military life, as bearing a resemblance to the Christian life, are numerous, and we find little or nothing like them in the writings of the other apostles.

This warfare Paul describes as twofold,—inward and outward.

Every Christian has to wage war against the evil that is in himself; every Christian has to take his part in fighting against the evil that he finds around him in the world and in the Church;—for in the Church, Paul found some of the worst enemies of the cross of Christ.

But in the text and context it is of the outward rather than of the inward warfare that the apostle discourses: of the fighting against evil, not in himself, but in the world and in the Church,—in that church of Corinth, for example, where there was abundant evil in the form of false doctrine, and in the form also of sinful conduct. And so it was in most of those apostolic churches. That which the apostle had first with much effort won for Christ, he had afterwards with efforts no less strenuous to hold for Christ. Men converted from Judaism or from heathenism and formed into a church, had not long been so formed before attempts were

made to introduce Jewish traditions or Gentile philosophies, by which Christian disciples were corrupted in their creed and in their practice. And so the Church, no less than the world, was a battle-ground for this warfare, in which St. Paul spent his life.

This warfare he describes in military language. It is the pulling down of strongholds, the casting down of imaginations and of every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, the bringing of every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. We are to imagine a city strongly fortified, as cities were fortified in Paul's time, with massive walls and lofty towers; and upon these walls and towers the military engines were brought to play until a breach was made, and the place was stormed and taken, and all found within it were made captive to the conqueror.

This warfare, which was so real and so earnest to the Apostle Paul, is in fact the great conflict of the ages, the endeavour on the part of Christian people to win the whole world for Christ. It is supposed that the Christian wages war with every sinful thought and feeling in his own heart, with every sin that besets him in his own life. None but those who fight that fight against sinful self are fit

to take part in this spiritual conflict with the world and with the Church, when the Church has become unfaithful to its Lord, and needs to be brought back to a true and firm allegiance to His throne. And of this warfare, this endeavour to win souls to Christ and keep them for Christ, every Christian ought to know something by experience. There are many strongholds to be pulled down, strongholds of ignorance, of superstition, of infidelity, of worldliness, of utter immorality and ungodliness. All metaphor apart, there is much, both in the Church and in the world, that is opposed to Christ ; much, therefore, that is opposed to God's glory and to man's welfare ; and against it all it is the duty of Christian people to contend with all earnestness, that sin may be vanquished and righteousness be triumphant in the bringing of every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

But now concerning the weapons of this warfare.

The apostle tells us that these weapons are 'not carnal.' The idea of carnal weapons is peculiar, and needs to be explained. I need scarcely say that the word carnal literally means fleshly ; but in Scripture the word flesh is sometimes used to represent human nature in its sinful, unregenerate state. This being so, we can easily understand

such expressions as the lusts of the flesh, the desires of the flesh, the works of the flesh,—the lusts, the desires, the works of unregenerate, unconverted human nature. Nor is it difficult to understand such an expression as fleshly or carnal weapons. They are such weapons as unregenerate men might be expected to employ, and such as they continually do employ in furtherance of their fleshly or carnal purposes. A carnal or fleshly weapon is not a weapon made of flesh, it is more likely to be made of iron or steel. But of whatever it is made, whatever its substance, it is a weapon adapted to carnal, fleshly, worldly purposes. It may be a sword, or a rifle, or a turret-ship ; it may be a shilling, or a guinea, or a ten-pound note. It may be a fine sacerdotal garment, a superstitious ceremony, an elaborate religious service. It may be a profane and bad word, a dishonest argument, an apposite but untrue anecdote, a skilfully concocted falsehood, an appeal that raises men's feelings up to a high pitch of excitement without convincing their judgments, or really affecting their consciences. There have been carnal weapons of many sorts ; and, unhappily, carnal weapons of every sort have been employed with a view to defending or extending the cause of Christ. Well had it

been if all churches and all Christians had understood and practised the lesson suggested by Paul's wise words, 'The weapons of our warfare are not carnal.'

Observe how the carnal weapons have been used and are being used still. Such carnal weapons as the prison, the sword, the stake, once much resorted to, have happily gone out of use, and amongst civilized peoples violent persecution on religious grounds has nearly ceased. But it is a mistake to suppose that the world has become so wise as to see that persecution is, under all circumstances, a blunder, or so pious as to feel that it is a sin. The sword has been sheathed, not destroyed ; and we can easily imagine such a return of ignorance and barbarity as would again unsheathe it to be used against heresy, and in the putting down of religious freedom.

'The weapons of our warfare are not carnal,' said St. Paul, eighteen centuries ago. And yet during the greater part of that period, carnal weapons have been all but universally employed in behalf of religion. Employed against heathens, Mohammedans, Jews, heretics ; employed by Catholics and by Protestants, the Puritans in their time of power being as apt as others to forget the

truth declared in our text, and in many forms set forth in the Christian Scriptures. And the property, the liberty, the lives of myriads have been sacrificed simply in consequence of the shameful fact, that so-called Christians, some of them no doubt very sincere and genuine Christians, would not learn this lesson, that ‘the weapons of our warfare are not carnal.’

To say no more about force and violence as weapons unfit for this warfare, bribery is another carnal weapon that has been largely used. I do not know that it is not a case of bribery when the State establishes and endows a church, giving it power and influence and emoluments that may attract, that do attract, and cannot but attract to its communion and its sanctuary many persons not influenced by pure Christian principle. State Churchism certainly was bribery, and bribery of the grossest kind, when no person was allowed to hold any office under Government unless he was a member of the Established Church, and from time to time took the sacrament in the Established Church. There are both clergy and laymen in Established Churches who, sincerely and from deep conviction attached to such churches, have never been in any sense or measure bribed to enter them

or to continue in them, men who are incapable of allowing their conscience and their honour so to be tampered with and sullied. Still there is a savour of bribery about the whole principle of State Churchism.

On a smaller scale bribery exists in many forms. Charities are used as bribes, or rather misused to the purposes of bribery. Throughout rural England the poor are bribed by this means. They shall have soup, blankets, clothing, and many other things if they go to church, and send their children to church schools. Even the temporal advantages, few and small as they are, which Dissenting Churches have to offer in the shape of relief to the indigent act as bribes. And I am not clear that there is not something akin to bribery in our Sunday school treats. At any rate, it is commonly observed that such treats influence the attendance to some extent, and it is sometimes urged, in justification of such treats, that other congregations give them, and the children will go to their schools if they do not receive similar treatment. Well, to whatever extent a Sunday school retains its scholars on that ground, the treat is bribery, a carnal weapon brought into our warfare for spiritual truth.

Ritualism is one of these carnal weapons,—a weapon which, in the Church of Rome and in the Greek Church also, has prevailed to the almost total extinction of spiritual, intelligent, heartfelt religion. That it has a strongly attractive power is certain ; but to what does it attract those who are taken with it ? It attracts them to the church, to the altar, to the choir, to the priest ; but not to Jesus Christ, not to holiness of life. Ritualism will secure much church-going, much saying of prayers, singing of hymns, partaking of sacraments, and general abject submission of body and soul to the will of a priest ; but all that may just take the place of trust in Christ, love to Christ, real work for Christ. A ritualistic church is just an armoury of carnal weapons.

I have spoken of State Churchism as a carnal weapon ; but it is quite possible for Christian people to employ carnal weapons in opposition to that system. When a society is formed and an agitation is got up in which, while Christian men on religious grounds oppose the union of Church and State, men who do not believe in Christianity and have no sort of sympathy with it, oppose State Churchism upon political grounds,—I think that in such a society there is something of the carnal

warfare and carnal weapons which the apostle so strongly condemns.

I know that this statement is likely to give offence to some of my friends, but I hope they will allow the free statement of an honest opinion. I will go further, and state my conviction that so much mingling of Christian people with those who care nothing about religion or who hate it,—so much mingling with them in seeking, through legislation, the suppression of vice, the encouragement of temperance, and aid and assistance in other matters of a religious and moral character, is to my mind a very doubtful procedure, an employment of carnal weapons in a spiritual warfare, a distrust of Christ and of His gospel, as though He and it were unequal to the task of destroying sin and regenerating the world.

I think, too, there are certain ways of stating some religious truths that deserve to be pronounced carnal weapons. For example, those highly wrought and vividly materialistic descriptions of the joys of heaven and the torments of hell,—descriptions that more resemble the Koran than the Bible. These seem to me to be carnal weapons. They give hopes, but hopes of a low and almost carnal sort, hopes of a sensuous nature, the joys

held forth being merely such an appeal to our love of ease, of wealth, of natural beauty. And these descriptions give rise to fears, awful and terrible fears ; but only fears of pain, altogether apart from anything like repentance for sin. The hell of much of our theology—yes, and I could add even the God of much of our theology—is a carnal weapon that may terrify some poor souls into what they think to be religion, but can never promote that love, that trust, that holiness wherein mainly true religion consists.

Carnal weapons ! Yes, there are plenty of them, and some far more dangerous than those, such as the prison, the sword, and the stake, that have become obsolete, and are not now used in the name and cause of religion. Let us have nothing to do with them. We are abundantly provided with weapons of a different sort, if we will but faithfully use them in the confidence that they are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. The girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, the shield of faith, and prayer. This is the armour of God, clad in which we shall be enabled to fight fairly, honourably, and successfully in this warfare against all evil.

In this struggle with the evil that so abounds in the world, the weapons of some men's warfare are State patronage and endowment, with petty persecutions and bribery. Others have recourse to fantastic vestments, imposing ceremonies, elaborate music, church-going from morning to night all the year round. Others, again, have their armoury stored with appeals to men's carnal hopes and carnal fears. There are those also who would fight the battle by means of noise, and crowds, and special efforts of various kinds, well advertised and well written up by papers hired or established for the purpose. And there are those, perhaps the foolishest of all, who hope by social science, apart from Christianity, to vanquish the world, the flesh, and the devil. We have heard of the poor old body who thought with her broom to sweep back the advancing surges of the Atlantic Ocean, and we have heard of the quack who sold a pill that was good against an earthquake. There are many such prattling and babbling about their ways of abating this evil and that, and of making the world a paradise of virtue and comfort. But no stronghold of sin has ever yielded to their weapons ; the devil laughs them and their armour to scorn

We have the unanswerable testimony of history to the glorious power of the gospel armour. Strongholds without number have fallen before these spiritual weapons, truth and righteousness, the Word of God, together with faith and prayer. Strongholds of Christian idolatry, and heathen philosophy; strongholds of slavery and of despotic and unrighteous power; strongholds of incredible vice and abomination. So let us have, in these weapons, the confidence which their divine origin and the well-accredited history of their great and glorious achievements warrant and deserve. These weapons, and these only, let us use; not seeking help elsewhere, not thinking to strengthen the spiritual by joining to it or mingling with it the carnal, which can only be a source of weakness and a cause of defeat. But do let us faithfully, courageously, laboriously use those weapons that the Lord has given us from His own armoury to fight withal in what is His cause. It is not enough to admire them, to believe in their efficiency, to perceive and understand their fitness for the work, to dwell upon the history of what has been accomplished. Let us use them; or those who do not believe in them, and think that they have found something better, will have reason to remain

sceptical as to the power of Christian truth and Christian principle.

Onward, then, in this warfare, never forgetting the inward conflict, the fighting against sin in our own hearts and lives; and our experience of the power of the gospel to subdue sin in ourselves, and to bring us in every thought into the obedience of Christ, will mightily tend to strengthen us with courage, faith, and hope, in bringing the same gospel to bear upon those whom we desire to see liberated from the bondage of sin, and brought into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Let us expect great things in the aggregate, and in the end look for nothing less than the promised moral conquest of the globe; but let us not be disheartened if our individual action do not seem to produce much effect. If we cannot pull down a stronghold of sin, it is something to shake, though ever so little, even one of the stones of which it is built; something to bring into captivity to the obedience of Christ were it no more than just one thought of some one mind. And perhaps, although you do not know it, and no one in this world may know it, you have brought into such captivity many such thoughts.

It is a great and difficult work. It has been

going on with many lets and hindrances for eighteen hundred years, it may go on with lets and hindrances for eighteen hundred more. We cannot expect to see the end of it in our time; we must be content and thankful to take our part in it, and do that part, however small and inconspicuous, faithfully and well. And though we sleep in death we shall awake to share the final triumph, when the voice of the archangel and the trump of God shall proclaim that the warfare is accomplished, and that the kingdoms of this world have all become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ.

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XIII.

NOT UNTO SINAI BUT UNTO SION.

'For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words ; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more : (for they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart : and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake;) But ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel.'—
HEB. xii. 18-24.

IN the study of this Epistle it must always be borne in mind, that the writer's great object is to guard the Hebrew Christians against the sin and danger of falling away from Christianity into Judaism. Now, in these verses, together with those that follow to the end of this chapter, the argument against such falling away is carried to a sublime climax and conclusion.

The question was, Christ, or Moses? The Gospel, or the Law? And in our text the two covenants or dispensations are contrasted in a very striking manner. The form of speech employed, though remarkable, is not singular. In the Epistle to the Galatians we find the Apostle Paul conducting a somewhat similar argument, and he employs a similar mode of illustration, making Sinai the symbol of the law, and Jerusalem the symbol of the gospel. And this allegory of the two covenants, as represented by Sinai and Jerusalem, is reproduced in our text, though in a very much modified form.

I think that if I were asked to state in the fewest words possible the gist of the seven verses which form our text, I should quote these words of Paul,— ‘Ye are not under the law, but under grace.’ In these nine words you have the sum and substance of the whole text. And taking these words of Paul for our guide, we can proceed thus: ‘Ye are not under the law, for ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched;’ and so on. No, ye are not under the law, for ye have nothing to do with those things; but ye are under grace, ‘for ye are come unto Mount Sion,’ and so on.

I. ‘Ye are not under the law.’ The writer of)
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the Epistle refers to the terrors that accompanied the giving of the law. If you consult the narrative in Exodus and Deuteronomy, you will perceive that this portion of our text is a brief summary of those things which filled the Israelites with such terror. They came to a mount that might be touched. I am very much inclined to think that, through some mistake, a word has here been dropped out, and that it were more correct to read, ‘The mount that might *not* be touched.’ Of course, Sinai, as a material object, *was* an object that could be touched, but it is not easy to see what need there was for stating this.

The main stress of the reference to that scene at Sinai is laid on the fact, that the people were forbidden to stand upon the mountain; thus we read, ‘And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount, shall surely be put to death: there shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live.’ If, in one sense, being a material object, it was a mount that might be touched; in another sense, all access to it being forbidden, it was a mount that

might not be touched, under the awful penalty of death.

That stern prohibition showed that the law, far from giving men free access to God, kept them at a distance from Him. Mount Sinai was God's throne at the giving of the law, and no one was then suffered to approach it. What a contrast we discern, when from these strict injunctions not to touch that mountain, we turn to this Epistle and read, 'Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.'

Concerning the dreadful sights and sounds that accompanied the giving of the law, we need say but little; but a remark is called for by what we read in ver. 19, 'The voice of words.' This expression has far more meaning than it appears to have; indeed, 'the voice of words' is an expression almost meaningless. But we must remember that the Jews called the ten commandments the ten words. They are understood in this sense in the passage, 'And God spake all these words: Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.' That was the first word. 'Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image.' That, with the remainder of the commandment, was the second word. And so

on with all the rest; they are the ten words. This is what is meant when in the text we read, ‘the voice of words,’ *i.e.* the voice that spoke the ten commandments. Probably a loud sound of the trumpet preceded each commandment, and so called the attention of the people at the foot of the mountain; then in an articulate voice, louder than any peal of thunder, God Himself spoke His word from out the fire, and blackness, and darkness, and tempest, that covered the summit of the mountain. ‘So terrible was the sight’ that even Moses, with all his courage, said, ‘I exceedingly fear and quake.’ We find no mention of this in the narrative recounting the giving of the law. It was probably a tradition, and a well-founded tradition, that Moses had so spoken on that awful occasion.

Now, in a certain sense the Jews, the Jews living when this Epistle was written, had come to that mountain, had come to Sinai. Literally, perhaps, not one of them had ever seen the place. Of course, none of them had seen the sights or heard the sounds that accompanied the giving of the law. But in this sense they had come to Mount Sinai: they had accepted the law that was given therefrom. They lived under the covenant of the ten words, under that covenant which said, ‘The man

who doeth these things shall live, and the man who doeth them not shall die.' They lived under that dispensation which kept them at a distance from God, and which hid God from them in the blackness, and darkness, and tempest. Their religion was the religion proclaimed from Mount Sinai.

The Hebrew Christians in their earlier days, and before they came to Christ, had been led to the mount by their parents, their teachers, their friends. But hearing the sound of the gospel, and seeing God in Christ, they had left it. Some of them, brought up from their infancy in the religion of the gospel, had never gone to Mount Sinai, had never lived under the old covenant, had never known what it was to be kept at a distance from God, the idea of which distance was kept up in the temple by the complete and awful isolation of the most holy place. Some of these Hebrew Christians had, from their earliest days, been led to the throne of grace, and had seen the glory of God in His revelation of Himself in Christ.

But now if, yielding to temptation,—if, in the fear of persecution, they adopted Judaism as their religion,—this would be a going to Mount Sinai, a surrender of all their Christian privileges, a

coming under the law, a submission to its yoke of bondage. To apostatize from Christianity to Judaism would mean to exchange faith in Christ for obedience to the law, to give up the principle of the gospel, ‘Believe, and live,’ for the principle of the law, ‘Do, or die !’

II. ‘But ye are not under the law, ye are under grace ;’ for ‘ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.’

Now, most of these clauses seem to refer to the future privileges and blessings of believers in Christ. The heavenly Jerusalem, the innumerable company of angels, the spirits of just men made perfect,—the coming to them certainly seems to be in the future, beyond this life and this world. But observe the distinct, emphatic present, ‘Ye are come.’ Not, ‘Ye shall come ;’ or even ‘Ye are

coming, ye are on your way to these blessings'—but, 'Ye are come,' or 'Ye have come.' The coming is a thing already accomplished. Just as certainly as the Israelites came to Mount Sinai, you have come to Mount Sion.

We must therefore endeavour to find some sense in which all these words are true of Christians in their present state. 'Ye are come,' or, 'Ye have come.' This statement relates to ~~each and every~~ clause.

Those clauses in the part of the text devoted to the covenant of grace, may be classified in this manner:—Ye are come to a certain place; ye are come to certain persons; and ye are come to a certain thing.

(1) And first, Ye are come to a certain place. 'Ye are come to Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.' Here the literal must give way to the figurative. Literally, those Hebrew Christians living in Jerusalem had often gone to Mount Sion, for there stood the temple; but, literally, the Jews who were not converted to Christ had just as often gone to Mount Sion, perhaps far oftener than those who had become His disciples; for the Jews of the stricter sort went to the temple every morning

and every evening to offer prayer. So that to say, ‘Ye are come unto Mount Sion,’ was to say nothing in the least peculiar to the Hebrew Christians.

But these Christians, well taught in Old Testament Scripture, knew that, in the familiar language of prophecy, Mount Sion was the emblem of the Church of God, and they of course recognised the antitype. The Lord’s prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple turned their thoughts away from the natural place and structure; and they thought instead of ‘the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.’ And so Mount Sion is called in the text, ‘The city of the living God.’

It is further described as ‘The heavenly Jerusalem,’ so that there may be no confusion, no mistake, no foolish and persistent clinging to the wicked and doomed city. ‘The heavenly Jerusalem.’ Not so much, not necessarily at all heavenly in regard to locality; but heavenly in regard to character; heavenly, not because locally exalted above the earth, but because permanent and holy. ‘Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,’ are terms by which we understand the Church of Christ. To this

these Hebrew Christians had come ; of this city they had become citizens.

The Church of Christ is God's city in this world. And yet, not alone in this world. Mount Sion was a part of Jerusalem that rose high above the rest, and crowned it with the glorious edifice of the temple. Hence it may be that by 'Mount Sion' we are to understand the Church above ; by 'the heavenly Jerusalem,' the Church below ; the intermediate clause, 'the city of the living God,' makes both one,—both are the city of God. So much for the *place* to which ye are come, 'Mount Sion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.'

(2) And ye are come 'to an innumerable company.' Here for a moment I pause ; and for this reason, that very few biblical scholars find themselves able to accept the arrangement of the clause as given in our version. What the writer of the Epistle first says is, 'Ye are come to an innumerable company ;' and then he describes that company,—an innumerable multitude, the inhabitants of this city to which ye are come. Mr. Wesley, following the great German scholar and commentator, Bengel, to whom he acknowledges himself much indebted, adopts this arrangement, and words the passage thus :—

‘Ye are come to an innumerable company, to the general assembly of angels, and to the church of the first-born which are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant.’ These are the innumerable company to which ye are come, in having come to Mount Sion, to the city of God, to the heavenly Jerusalem.

(a) First in this innumerable company we read of angels,—the general assembly of angels. But let us examine this expression, ‘the general assembly.’ It means something very different from the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and from the assemblies, unions, congresses of many other churches, convened mainly for discussion, legislation, and so on. The word translated ‘general assembly’ occurs in no other passage of Scripture; but its meaning is, an assembly of an especially joyful character, a distinctly festal assembly; and one translator renders it the ‘festive assembly of the angels.’ The angels were present at the giving of the law, but they were not then in ‘festive assembly.’ There was nothing of a joyous character about that gathering of the angels on Mount Sinai. Even in the hearts of angels we may suppose that

there was more of fear than of gladness, surrounded as they were by blackness, and darkness, and tempest. But here we read of the festive assembly of the angels. They are in full sympathy with the covenant of grace ; they rejoice to be sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation. They are glad to come, as God's servants, to carry Lazarus to Abraham's bosom, to carry every believing and departing soul to his rest and his reward. There is a shout of joy among them over every sinner that repenteth.

The *πανήγυρις* of the angels. Our word panegyric tells us that in this *πανήγυρις* there must be something joyful, something calling forth admiration and praise. I consult the lexicon for the usage of the old Greek word, and find that it was used to designate the assembly that gathered to witness the Olympic games. And now, recurring to the first verse of this chapter, in which I find the Christian life represented as a race, run in the presence of a great cloud of witnesses, I come to the conclusion that the festal assembly of the angels means the angels witnessing, with joyful interest, every believer in his conflicts, and rejoicing with joy unspeakable as each attains the goal and wins the prize.

(A) And ye are come to the ‘church of the first-born which are written in heaven.’ By the ‘church of the first-born,’ I understand the Church, the whole Church, but more especially the Church on earth who are not in heaven, but whose names are enrolled there. ‘The Church of the first-born,’ because all the Church is blessed with the privileges of the first-born. In point of time some are born earlier, some later. Some were born, born naturally, and born spiritually, *i.e.* born again, ages ago; and some will be born ages hence. But they are all first-born in this sense, that they are all heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. Ye are come to them, ye are numbered among them, ye are first-born sons. Not sons only, but first-born sons, with great and glorious privileges; heirs to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, that fadeth not away.

(C) And ye are come ‘to God the Judge of all.’ It could scarcely be said of the Israelites at Mount Sinai that they came to God. They were kept at a distance from Him, not permitted to approach even the lowest step of His mountain throne; and their impulse was to flee from Him rather than draw near to Him. Neither then nor ever afterwards in tabernacle or in temple could the people,

under the covenant of the law, come to God. The holy place excluded all but the priests; the most holy place excluded even them. But, in contrast with that separation and that distance, Christians come into God's very presence; they have access with confidence; they have boldness to enter into the holiest of all, because the veil has been rent in twain. There are no bounds and fences set about Mount Sion; the gates of the New Jerusalem are open continually, that all may enter and come to the living God who dwells and reigns there. The law said, 'Keep off, lest ye die.' The gospel says, 'Come, that ye may live.'

It is not easy to understand why, in this enumeration of gospel privileges, this, 'Ye are come to God the Judge of all,' stands where it does, fourth on the list. We should, and not without reason, expect it to be first. It is something far greater to have come to God than to have come to Mount Sion, to the assembly of angels, or to the Church of the first-born. But take the seven clauses which set forth our gospel privileges, and if we hold, as indeed we must, that coming to God to be the very chiefest of them all,—well then, where does it stand? Neither first at the head of a descending series, nor last at the tail of an

ascending series ; but in the centre, standing above all, crowning all, glorifying all.

Again the question is suggested, Why is God thus spoken of as the Judge ? In an account of Christian privileges, might we not with some reason expect Him to be spoken of as our Father ? Is there not much of the severer and more legal aspect of the divine character in this word Judge ? There is ; but let us remember the position of the Hebrew Christians. They were sorely persecuted for their faith ; they could expect no protection, no justice, no pity from any civil power. It was well, then, for their friend the writer of this Epistle to remind them, for their encouragement, that God is the Judge of all, and that they had come to Him ; that He, the Judge of all, was their friend, and so let them persevere, in the assurance that He who judgeth righteously would justify them and avenge them of their cruel adversaries. Moreover, in speaking of God as the Judge of all, the greatness of Christian privilege is shown ; in that, although God bears this awful office and prerogative, Christians have nothing to fear, but have everything to hope, because the Judge of all has accepted them, and declared that there is for them no condemnation.

(d) And ye are come 'to the spirits of just men made perfect.' By that former clause, 'the Church of the first-born,' we understood the Church on earth; by this, we may understand the Church above. These words, 'the spirits of just men made perfect,' refer us to the first verse of the chapter; 'the spirits of just men made perfect' forming the 'cloud of witnesses,' in so far as the cloud of witnesses is composed of those who have finished their course, and entered into the 'rest that remaineth for the people of God.' The spirits of just men made perfect through the death and resurrection of Christ. In previous passages the writer of the Epistle teaches us that the Old Testament saints, from Abel to the last of the prophets, however holy they had been in this world, and however happy they had been in heaven, were not made perfect until Jesus had died for their sins and risen for their justification. As we read, 'And these all having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.' But they obtained the promise when Jesus died and rose again, and then they were made perfect.

To these spirits of just men made perfect ye are

come. Ye are come to Mount Sion as well as to Jerusalem. Ye are in fellowship with the Church above as well as with the Church below. The spirits of just men made perfect and rejoicing before the throne are our fellow-citizens, our kindred, members of the same great family of redeemed souls. The accusers of the Hebrew Christians probably told them that, by apostatizing from Judaism, they had cut themselves off from all fellowship with the Old Testament saints; that Abraham had discarded them; that Israel had ceased to acknowledge them; that Moses and David and the prophets looked upon them as renegades, and frowned upon them. But the writer of the Epistle assures them that such is not the case. What did the Transfiguration of Jesus teach, when Moses and Elias appeared talking with Him on the mount? It taught this, that the spirits of just men made perfect were in entire accord of mind and heart and soul with Jesus, and therefore with all true disciples of Jesus.

(e) 'Ye are come to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant.' The Israelites at Mount Sinai came to Moses, and begged him to be their mediator with

God. Terrified by the awful sights and sounds of Sinai, they came to him and said, ‘ Speak thou with us, and we will hear ; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.’ So Moses was their mediator in regard to that old covenant of the law. ‘ But ye are come to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant,’ the covenant of grace, not of works.

Now, why the name Jesus? why not Christ? Because, as has been well observed, the name Jesus is ever significant of His mission. ‘ Thou shalt call His name Jesus : for He shall save His people from their sins.’ Jesus means a Saviour, while Christ simply means the Anointed One, and might be applied to a king, to a prophet, and to a priest. Jesus means a *Saviour*. And not a king, not a prophet, not a priest, but a Saviour is the person, the very person, the only person, who can serve us as our mediator, to deliver us from our sins.

Ye are come to Jesus now, as of old the Israelites came to Moses. As they trusted in his mediation, so you trust in the mediation of Jesus. As they committed their cause to Moses, that he might plead for them, so you have committed your cause to Jesus, that He may plead for you. While in a previous part of the Epistle the writer has dwelt largely on the great superiority of Jesus to Moses,

now it is shown that He is a better mediator far. Moses was the mediator of the covenant whose promise was, ‘He that doeth these things shall live by them.’ Jesus is the mediator of a covenant which says, ‘He that believeth on Me shall live by Me.’

Such is the innumerable company to which the Hebrew Christians had come, to which all Christians have come. We may now take the clauses in a different order:—Ye are come to God the Judge of all, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the festive assembly of the angels, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to the Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven.

To all these are we come; with all these it is our grand privilege to be in harmony, in sympathy, in fellowship. We are no longer strangers and pilgrims; we are fellow-citizens with the saints in the heavenly Jerusalem; we belong to the kindred of God; angels are our friends, and all the departed are our brethren. And better still, the Judge of all has received us, freed from condemnation, through the intercession of the Mediator of the new covenant.

(3) But once more, we have come to a glorious

~~place, 'the city of the living God,' we have come to a glorious company, consisting of God and Christ, of angels and saints; and we have also come to 'the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.'~~

(The sprinkling of the blood of the atonement sacrifice upon the mercy-seat was perhaps the most solemn and most important rite of the Jewish religion, when once in the year the high priest went into the holy of holies with that blood which had been shed to atone for the people's sins. The Hebrew Christians had with their reception of the gospel rejected that solemn ceremony. Their countrymen still adhering to the law would, no doubt, regard such conduct as in the uttermost degree profane. To count that blood an unholy thing, to ascribe no merit or virtue to it, to disregard the entire institution of the Levitical atonement,—was not this to reject the one method by which God had signified His willingness to pardon sin? But the writer of the Epistle reminds his friends of that other blood of sprinkling to which they were come, and in which they trusted,—the blood of Jesus sprinkled upon the true mercy-seat in heaven. That was their atonement, 'the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that

of Abel.' For Abel's blood cried for vengeance; the blood of Christ cries for forgiveness.

In this list of gospel privileges the blood of sprinkling is mentioned last, but it is not on that account the least. This is indeed the source of all other blessings. In the order of time we come to this first. It is only through this and by reason of this that we come to Jesus as our Mediator, for it is through His blood pleading for our pardon that He is our Mediator. It is only through this that we can come with confidence to God the Judge of all, and it is through the blood of sprinkling, the blood of Christ sprinkled on the mercy-seat and sprinkled on our hearts, that we can come to Mount Sion, and have fellowship with angels and with saints.

‘Ye are not under the law, but under grace.’ Such, I have said, is the gist of the whole text. The author of the Epistle has shown his friends what it is to be under the law, and what it is to be under grace. Ought they, would they, could they be constrained to forsake these glorious privileges, and go back to Sinai, with its terrors, and with its bounds and fences that forbade all approach to God? Surely they would never act so foolishly and so wickedly. Rather, however persecuted

they might be, let them rejoice in all the blessings to which they had been called through the gospel of Christ, and be prepared, were it God's will, to die for the covenant of grace, rather than to live under the covenant of the law.

XIV.

THE SALVATION ARMY.

'Fight the good fight of faith.'—1 TIM. vi. 12.

THERE are many passages of Scripture in which the Christian life is represented as a warfare. I do not think such passages are to be found in the words of Jesus Christ. In figuratively illustrating the Christian life, our Lord speaks not of the soldier fighting his battles, but rather of the fisherman casting and drawing his nets, of the labourer bearing the burden and heat of the day, of the shepherd going in search of a lost sheep, of the servant entrusted with his master's money that he might trade with it for the master's profit, of the merchant seeking goodly pearls, of the housewife leavening the meal. The peaceful callings of life provide the Prince of Peace with His emblems of spiritual life, as though He so disliked all strife and violence and cruelty, as not even to admit them figuratively into His discourse concerning the character and conduct of His disciples. War and

warriors He does not honour by making them in any way representative of Christian duty and experience. Thus, the greatest and best of all teachers omits, as utterly distasteful to Him, all illustrations of His religion that might be drawn from military sources.

Some of His disciples, however, were not so choice and careful as to follow His example, and he who has most to say through military metaphors is the Apostle Paul. Perhaps this is in a measure to be ascribed to the fact that he, more any other of the apostles, was familiar with the soldier's life. Travelling so much in the length and breadth of the Roman empire, he saw almost everywhere the garrisons, the fortresses, the roads by means of which the Roman power was sustained. Moreover, he seems to have been a man of a combative disposition. He was so before his conversion, when he persecuted the Church ; he was so afterwards, when he contended with Jews, with Gentiles, and with those Christians who corrupted the gospel by mingling with it the elements of the law. At any rate, Paul is the man who, far more frequently than any other in the apostolic age, borrowed his illustrations of Christian life and duty from the work, the discipline, the struggles, the dangers, the triumphs incident to a soldier's

calling. In most of his Epistles there is something of this character. He exhorts Timothy to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ; he speaks of himself as having fought a good fight; the description of the Christian warfare and the Christian armour, which we read in his Epistle to the Ephesians, is one of the most eloquent passages of his writings.

In the use of these emblems Paul has been largely imitated. The military illustrations have been by many Christian writers preferred to the practical and more peaceful imagery which distinguishes our Saviour's teaching. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is full of fighting, and his *Holy War* is a military allegory from beginning to end. The Church of England, in administering the Sacrament of Baptism, signs the baptized with the sign of the cross, in token that he shall not be ashamed to fight under Christ's banner, and to continue His faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end. In Christian hymns such imagery abounds, and in Christian versions of the Psalms, the language employed by David, in a very literal sense, is adapted more or less skilfully to spiritual conflicts, defeats, and victories.

The worst of it is, that in some instances familiarity with the idea of the Church militant

has produced many of the passions and the cruelties of literal warfare ; as, for example, in the Crusades, in the conduct of some of the Reformers, and in the spirit, the words, and the deeds of many of the Puritans, who, I think, it must be confessed, seemed to take Joshua rather than Jesus as their favourite example, and admired Samuel exceedingly for hewing Agag in pieces before the Lord.

There is among us in these days an institution which bears the name of the Salvation Army. Its members are very numerous, it is liberally sustained, it appears to be skilfully organized. It is full of zeal, and energy, and courage. Its doctrine, so far as I am acquainted with it, is evangelical. It preaches Christ and Him crucified. It tells men that they are sinners, and that salvation is in Christ, and in Christ alone. I have no doubt that the Salvation Army has done, and is doing, much good ; that it has rescued very many from ignorance, from vice, from misery ; that not a few whose mouths were full of cursing and lewdness are now, through the work of the Salvation Army, singing psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs. And drunkards have been sobered, and harlots have been persuaded to lead lives of virtue, and thieves, and prize-fighters, and rogues of all sorts have been reclaimed, and are in their be-

haviour orderly, law-abiding, and respectable. The Salvation Army finds scope for its warfare in other lands, where it has been subject to much persecution.

On the whole, I believe that there is much to be said in its favour and to its praise. Its methods are not all that might be desired. There is a poor grotesqueness in its parody of military titles and military manners. Paul never went the length of calling himself a general, or any of his Christian friends and fellow-workers majors and captains. There are limits beyond which all metaphor becomes absurd, and in my opinion the Salvation Army has gone beyond these limits. Some of its advertisements are in very bad taste. Its banners, processions in the streets, bands of music, are, as it seems to me, unworthy of the great cause for which the Salvation Army professes to exist. On these accounts, then, and such as these, the institution is very much disliked, and held up to ridicule and contempt. But further, it is said that the Army's conversions are the result of excitement, that many of the converted fall again into their old ways, that most scandalous immoralities are constantly coming to light, that members of the Army often figure, and figure very discreditably, in the police courts; that cases of intemperance, vio-

lence, falsehood, theft, and profligacy are not uncommon.

Now, as to these unfavourable judgments I desire to say a word or two. The very extravagances of the Army, in its nomenclature, its advertisements, its bands of music, its processions, have at any rate called some attention to religion, more attention than has been called to it by quieter and more dignified methods of procedure. As to the military titles borne by officers of the Salvation Army, I confess that they appear to me extremely ridiculous; but when we find angels in one denomination, and very reverends in another, why should not the Salvation Army play the same childish and harmless game in their way, and have their colonels and their captains? As to the cases of apostasy, I would say, let the church or denomination that is without sin, and without just such sin, cast the first stone at the Salvation Army. An impartial press, so far as it is impartial, in giving publicity to the faults of professedly religious people, finds about as much to expose and to condemn in one denomination as in another; and when you have read of some Salvation Army scandal, read on, provided your taste leads in this way, and you will soon come upon a shameful story of a Baptist minister, or of a clergyman of

the Established Church. I do not know that in the Salvation Army there is a disproportionately large number of such discreditable cases ; but if there were, we are surely bound in all justice to bear in mind the classes from which largely the Salvation Army draws its recruits. And those who object to the Salvation Army and its peculiar ways ought to consider, whether the coldness and indolence of other denominations has not had much to do in creating the necessity for a method of procedure less decorous but more vigorous than has been common among professors of religion. Had we and others done our duty in going out into the streets, and lanes, and highways, and hedges, and finding out the poor, the halt, the maimed, the blind, the ignorant, the squalid, the wretched, the lost,—had we sought them, found them, and by kind persuasion and genuine sympathy compelled them to come in, there had been no need for Salvation Armies with their flags, and drums, and dingy uniforms, strange phraseology, holiness barracks, and knee drill.

And surely there is something worthy of admiration and of imitation in the courage of the Salvation Army. Some may call it boldness, impudence, love of notoriety. I will not impute mean motives. I see them professedly, and I am

willing to believe really, for the good of their fellow-creatures doing what I dare not do, incurring obloquy and reproach from which I should shrink, and I honour them for it, and wish I had some of their intrepidity in contending for the faith once delivered to the saints. One thing in particular, and a thing of no small importance, the Salvation Army is teaching us, viz. that religion and religious work is not a matter for Sunday observance alone. These people's services are very frequent, are almost perpetual. I don't like the noise of their drums, but perhaps I ought to listen to it, as summoning me to more Christian service and effort than I am wont to engage in.

Another estimable characteristic of the Salvation Army is, that they do not aim at conventional respectability. The preaching of the gospel to the poor is the function which they seek to discharge, and with which they are content, and they affect not the suburbs but the slums.

I should think that there is no section of the Christian Church which, in proportion to its numbers, does more for the cause of temperance than the Salvation Army. I believe that total abstinence from all intoxicating drinks is an essential article of their creed and practice. In going so far they may be interfering with the liberty

wherewith Christ makes us free, yet anything that promotes temperance, and with it must needs promote so many other excellent things, is more worthy of approval than of censure, and is a source of good, temporal and spiritual, to the people, and to all the best interests of the country.

The Salvation Army also appears to me to act very wisely in this respect, that usually they just rent, on the best terms they can secure, such places as they can find suitable, not being over particular as to the suitability—a played-out skating-rink, a tumble-down shed, an empty barn, anything will do, and they ‘endure the hardness’ of much discomfort, but thus they avoid the cost of expensive permanent buildings, and are the more able to keep out of the difficulty and disgrace of debt. And so, with all that may be said against the Salvation Army, against its grotesqueness, its vulgarity, its excitement, its failures, there are some leaves in its book which other Christian workers would do well to copy.

What seems least admirable in connection with this comparatively new form of Christian zeal, is the assumption conveyed by the use of the definite article in its title, *The Salvation Army*. Let it be gladly recognised by all Christians as a *Salvation Army*, or better still, a part of the *Salvation Army*,

for the Salvation Army consists of all true believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, the whole Christian Church, the sacramental host of God's elect. And if the too ambitious name of the Salvation Army bring us to think of this, the assumption, however unjustifiable, may do us good. For most Christians seem to have forgotten this idea of spiritual warfare, or never to have had it in their minds. Most of us have done something in the way of figurative fighting ; thus we have fought for money, thus we have fought for power, thus we have fought for politics, fighting the battle of life, as we say ; but in all this there is no mention of the good fight of faith, of the warfare to which as Christians we have been called, and to which by our baptismal vow so many of us have pledged ourselves.

The Church, the whole Church, is the Salvation Army, and the army and its great commander are, in language of mystic grandeur, described in the Book of Revelation xix. 11-14. Such is the Salvation Army and its purpose in the conquest of the world for Christ. But the warfare of the Salvation Army is twofold—warfare within and warfare without, and it is only the faithful warfare within that can give power and success to the warfare without. (We therefore should begin with fighting against our own self, against all that is

evil there, all indolence and love of ease, all impatience and discontent, all pride and naughtiness, all wrath and hatred, all untruthfulness and hypocrisy, all meanness and avarice, all intemperance and excess, all impure lusts and passions that war against the soul. There is a great, a difficult, a lifelong warfare for every man; great because the adversaries are so many, difficult because many are so strong, and a lifelong warfare, for I think no man can say, without self-deception, that he has vanquished all the enemies of his soul and slain them, so that they shall trouble him no more. Let this warfare be well maintained, and conducted in all watchfulness, and in all dependence upon the strength that Christ alone can give, that we may be strong in Him and in the power of His might, and sin shall at last have no dominion over us. And in proportion as we manfully wage this warfare within, we shall be fitted for the warfare without. We shall find our place in it; there should be no difficulty about that. For the world abounds in sin, and in the deplorable results of sin, and the great object of God's Salvation Army is the salvation of man from sin and its results. There is ignorance; attack that by seeking to impart knowledge: there is prejudice; elude that by speaking words in season, and speaking them

kindly : there is error ; wound that by the repetition of what you know to be the truth : there is intemperance ; seek to vanquish this foe by gentle expostulation, faithful warning, and an irreproachable example. There are men whom you know, and who are living in sin, or in danger of falling into sin, and your place and your work in the Salvation Army is to seek by all means the salvation of such. Do not leave it to a minister. No man can be your substitute in this warfare. Were all Christians to realize the idea of active service in the great Salvation Army, we could look with hope to a comparatively rapid conquest of the world in the name and to the glory of our Lord.

In the Salvation Army of which Mr. Booth is the general, there may be much that you disapprove, as in your judgment unwise, fantastic, coarse. But I believe that much of this, if not all of it, is made up for in the practical work which the general and his friends are doing, and in the example of zeal and courage and freedom from frigid conventionalism which they are setting to all churches. And if this institution be in our opinion faulty, let us try to do the work better. It is neither wise nor charitable to despise and to deride methods of religious work because they are not

such as we are inclined to pursue. If Christ be preached, let us therein rejoice, and not be over critical as to the mode, provided the object be attained. The Salvation Army as led by the apostles was sneered at by scornful sceptics, as composed of the weak, the foolish, the base, the despised, and Paul accepted the language of the scoffers : be it so ; God has chosen such that the excellency of the power may be seen to be of Him. There are so many of the professed soldiers of Christ who do nothing, wish to do nothing, and are afraid to do anything in the war with sin and misery, that one may well be thankful to see any of them alive and awake to their work, and doing it, if not in the wisest and most tasteful way, yet under the influence of right motives, as we have no right to doubt the members of the Salvation Army are doing it. And with all my heart I wish them success in the name of the Lord.

XV.

A PROPHET'S MISTAKE.

'God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew. Wot ye not what the Scripture saith of Elias ? How he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed Thy prophets, and digged down Thine altars ; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. But what saith the answer of God unto him ? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.'—ROM. xi. 2-4.

WHEN the prophet Elijah uttered the words here ascribed to him, he was in a very desponding state of mind, and that not without reason. For the idolatrous king of Israel, and his still more idolatrous queen, not content with setting up, establishing, and sustaining the worship of Baal, had forcibly put down all through the country the worship of the true God, and in the most ferocious manner persecuted those who professed to believe in Him and serve Him. The prophets, who were the teachers of religion, were slain with the sword. The altars on which sacrifices had been offered to the God of Israel had been destroyed. All public worship of Jehovah had been suppressed, the

entire people seemed to be given to idolatry, and well might Elijah be driven to despair.

And yet the great prophet was in error. The gift of prophecy never amounted to omniscience ; it was limited to the supernatural foreknowledge of some few events, beyond which, or beside which, the prophet knew no more than his neighbours. Elijah knew that for three years there should be neither shower of rain nor even a drop of dew upon all the land of Israel. But he did not know that, in the midst of that general and apparently universal apostasy, there were beside himself other worshippers of the true God. He thought he was alone, the one solitary believer in the God of Israel, whereas there were many as faithful as himself. He thought that all the prophets of the Lord were destroyed, but he soon discovered in Elisha a prophet who proved to be hardly inferior to himself. In fact, wise as he was, and greatly gifted with prophetic power, he was greatly mistaken, and took far too gloomy a view of the state of true religion in his time.

And in this matter many Christian people are rather given to imitating Elijah. They are apt to have desponding, almost despairing thoughts of God's cause and kingdom in the world. There are some to whom the state of religion seems as bad as

it appeared to Elijah. Even in the matter of numbers, though no man can say with the great prophet of Israel, ‘I only am left,’ still confessedly those who believe in God and serve Him, those who trust in Christ and obey Him, are but a very small fraction of mankind. And some good people’s notions of orthodoxy are so exceedingly contracted, that they can recognise as the people of God and as heirs of eternal life none but the few, the very few, whose opinions coincide with their own, and who pronounce their shibboleth correctly. And then to many the progress made by Christianity seems slow, if not altogether imperceptible. They probably do not read much about missionary labours and their results, but without evidence, and contrary to evidence, they consider missions a failure ; and most worldly-minded men, who have been in those places where missions are stationed, quite expect their testimony to be believed when they assert that missions do no good, or do more harm than good. They have been on the spot, and that is enough. It never occurs to them that they may have been incompetent observers ; it never occurs to them that the fact of their being prejudiced observers invalidates their testimony ; it never occurs to them that their own conduct, as persons bearing the Christian name and leading

very unchristian lives, may be the chief cause of the failure, in so far as failure does befall missionary endeavours. But their report is prejudicial, and fills many minds with disappointment at the slow progress, if there be any progress, of the gospel in the heathen world.

Another cause of despondency is found in the advancement of systems which we believe to be bad. Elijah complained that the worship of Baal had superseded the worship of God ; and nowadays it seems to many that the superstition of Popery, the follies of Ritualism, the assaults made upon revealed religion by Rationalism, threaten the extinction of evangelical truth. Into churches and denominations hitherto free from anything objectionable, doctrines and practices have been introduced that are highly detrimental to true religion. The trumpet gives an uncertain sound ; the Word of God is handled with an unbecoming and dangerous freedom of thought, and some of the most dearly-cherished doctrines of our pious ancestors are repudiated with laughter and contempt.

Upon some minds the dissensions of Christians presses heavily as a discouragement and a source of anxiety. We are not one in creed ; we are not one in worship ; we are not one in heart. There is such division, such bitterness, such wrangling and

disputing and hatred. And the Lord's prayer that His people may all be one is manifestly an unanswered prayer. We are neither one nor two, nor three, nor twenty ; there are scores of sects and parties.

And then the inconsistencies of professing Christians drive some almost to despair. There is not much difference between the Church and the world. In some respects the world often seems to be the better of the two—more honourable, more straightforward, more good-tempered, more charitable. Christian profession is no guarantee for sobriety, for purity, for helpfulness, for honesty, for generosity ; and often those who have taken a leading part in religious movements are discovered to be utterly unprincipled. And I do not suppose that, as a rule, Christian people themselves consider that, in any matter of business, they are safer in the hands of professors of religion than in the hands of men who make no such profession.

And so there is very much that is calculated to produce in us a depressed, melancholy, hopeless state of mind, similar to that felt and expressed by Elijah. Such thoughts, however, are not wholesome. It does us harm to cherish them. They take all heart and hope from us in regard to Christian work, which, like all other work, to be done well must

be done in a cheerful confidence that it will by no means prove to be labour in vain. There is such a thing as being too sanguine ; but no man would commit an important enterprise to one who saw only the dark side of it, the difficulties, and the probabilities of failure. For, as an old proverb says, to believe a thing impossible is the way to make it so.

These discouraging and disheartening thoughts must affect us injuriously, not only in our Christian work, tempting us to give it up as impracticable and to no purpose ; they cannot but shake our personal religion, our faith in the gospel. They tend to infidelity, they are both causes and evidences of unbelief, and they are highly dishonouring to God.

I am sure the manner in which we may sometimes hear good men express themselves in prayer, when they give way to these desponding thoughts, is most distressing ; it borders, and more than borders, on the blasphemous ; it is, I think, one of the most profane forms of profanity. It calls in question the wisdom, the power, the truthfulness, and the mercy of God.

He would but cannot, or He could but will not save the world more rapidly, more strikingly, more triumphantly than He does. That really is the

logic of many prayers; with this in addition, that we are far more concerned for the moral, spiritual, and eternal welfare of mankind than God is. And when men express themselves as dissatisfied with the gospel, and with the gift of the Holy Ghost, and cry out for Christ's personal coming and bodily presence as the only help and the only hope for the world, they really tell God that this dispensation is very much of a mistake, and that He has erred altogether in the method He has chosen in the world's deliverance from sin.

Now, it is on all accounts desirable that we should drive from us these desponding thoughts, which are so unwholesome to ourselves and so dis honouring to God. Let us remember how it was in Elijah's case. The state of religion was not simply better, but was actually seven thousand times better than the good man supposed. It may be seven thousand times better now than some melancholy Christians think. 'I alone am left,' said Elijah, because he did not happen to know any other worshipper of the true God. Let us learn that God always has His hidden ones, who perhaps make no profession, belong to no church, are never reckoned up in any denominational statistics, but very earnestly and consistently practise true religion, constrained by a sense of duty and by the love

of Christ, and led by the secret working of the Spirit of God in their souls.

All things considered, there is far more reason for gratitude and hope than for grumbling and despair in regard to the cause of God and His truth. Even as regards the question of numbers, there really are many more Christians in the world now than there have been in any previous age. Whatever unbelievers, with an affectation of philosophical judgment, choose to say about Christianity as obsolete or obsolescent, gone out or going out, the fact is that, wisely or unwisely, men do accept it; accept it certainly in numbers twenty to one, yes, a hundred to one, greater than those who accept any specific form of sceptical or atheistical philosophy.

And then, never let us forget that at least one half of the human race, those who die in childhood, are saved. I do not wonder that our Lord, speaking of little children, should say, ‘Of such is the kingdom of heaven.’

Again, if we have the courage to cast aside the dogmatism of creeds formulated by men, and to consider all that may be meant by our Lord when he says, ‘He that knew not his Lord’s will, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes:’ if, I say, we have the

courage to reflect upon all that these words may mean, we may perhaps see hope for the whole heathen world; hope enough certainly to relieve our minds of the awful burden imposed by the strictly orthodox notion of the consignment of the entire heathen world to endless misery! Is that what Jesus means by a ‘few stripes’?

It is the shocking narrowness of our creeds that makes us so desponding in regard to the fewness of the saved. When a man believes that his Protestant neighbour cannot be saved, that his Catholic neighbour cannot be saved, that his Unitarian neighbour cannot be saved, that his Swedenborgian neighbour cannot be saved, that his neighbour who makes no profession and belongs to none of these societies called churches cannot be saved;—I say, when a man’s creed is thus cramped, he may well be miserable, he ought to be miserable, in the contemplation of the awful idea that almost every soul of man will be eternally lost! A little more breadth, a little more generosity in men’s creeds, would afford them great relief and comfort in enabling them to believe that, within very wide latitudes and longitudes of creed, God will forgive and bless and save poor, ignorant, lost, and sinful men.

But it will be said, ‘The Bible requires’—

Well, what does it require? It requires men to believe in Jesus Christ. Yes, if they know of Jesus Christ; but it is not so unreasonable as to require belief in Him on the part of those who know nothing of Him, and to threaten them with punishment for their unbelief. It argues the matter in this way, ‘How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?’

And what does the Bible require men to believe concerning Jesus Christ when they have heard of Him? It requires them to believe that He can and will save them. But it is a monstrous misinterpretation to say, that the Bible requires a man to believe all that you and I probably do believe concerning Christ, in order to their being saved. Paul said to the Philippian jailer, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.’ But he did not exact the belief in certain doctrines concerning the person of Christ, and the precise nature and extent of Christ’s work.

Do let us have more confidence in the love of God. Do let us remember that He sent His Son into the world that the world,—not some small portion of it,—but the world, through Him might be saved. Do let us learn from the extent of God’s love in providence the vastness of His love in grace. Will He who causes His sun to shine

on the evil and on the good, and bestows rain upon the just and upon the unjust,—will He stop there, and, when neither sun nor rain can benefit the evil and the unjust, have nothing for them but anger and torment everlasting?

Of course I do not know, but I hope, and see much good reason in nature and in Scripture for believing that, as in the case of Elijah, so in the case of many narrow-minded Christians, the real state of religion in regard to the number of souls accepted, pardoned, saved, is greater far than their wretched theology allows them to suppose.

In regard to other matters also which cause despondency about the state of religion in the world, I think that a strong and healthy mind will throw off all such unhappy apprehensions. Since there is Popery with its crafty superstitions, since there is Ritualism with its solemn absurdities, I thank God that there is also Rationalism, bold, free thought to oppose and counteract those deceivers of the superstitious type. The Rationalism of this day is just, for this day, what the Rationalism of the Reformers was in their time. I say again, I thank God that there is a development of Rationalism. I know that it goes far beyond the point to which I can follow it, or have any desire to follow it; but I believe that it has in it a tendency to

keep religious fanaticism, both in doctrine and in worship, well curbed by common sense. And in so far as the rationalistic spirit teaches us to use our reason in connection with our religion, Rationalism is invaluable, and supplies a want that otherwise exposes religion to the danger of utter corruption and debasement.

How much worse is the condition of religion in consequence of the acceptance on the part of religious men of much that has been introduced by what may be called Rationalism? It was Rationalism that required men to abandon the old notion of the sun's daily motion round the globe. The abandonment of that notion was at one time considered equivalent to a profession of infidelity, but it has been abandoned; and men can be quite as religious, and are quite as religious, under the Newtonian system, as under the rude and ignorant conceptions of the universe which this system has displaced.

Almost all intelligent and well-informed Christians believe that more than six thousand years have elapsed since the creation of the world, and that more than six days were spent in creating it; but this relinquishment of the literal interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis has not proved to be at all injurious to the religious life.

In regard to the belief in witchcraft and other kindred superstitions, Rationalism has taught as much. ‘Giving up witchcraft is in effect giving up the Bible,’ said one good man. But we do not find, as a matter of fact, that religion has in any way suffered through the giving up of such foolish and degrading beliefs.

Thus Rationalism is doing good service. At first it seems to set religion and science at variance, but upon due consideration it is found that it rather brings them into harmony. And once more I say, since the minds of men are so prone to credulity and superstition, so apt to grovel in abject submission to the assumptions and superstitions of priestcraft,—worse craft than that of witches ever was,—we have reason to be thankful for this element of Rationalism, which calls upon men to think boldly for themselves, and promises such a reformation of religion as is needed at the present time almost as much as, in its day, was needed the Reformation achieved by those great Rationalists, Luther, Zwingle, and Knox.

I do not say that everything in the condition and prospects of Christ’s cause is encouraging. But if the discouragements were far greater than they are, it would ill become Christ’s disciples to give way to despondency. God’s love to the world

is greater far than ours ; and the assurance of that love should kindle in our hearts hopes of far better things for the world than our uncharitable creeds would permit us to expect. If God sent His own Son into the world that the world through Him might be saved, we may be very sure that the saved will prove to be not some small fraction, but the overwhelming majority of mankind. The case was seven thousand times better than Elijah thought. It may prove seven thousand times better than many of us have had the courage or the charity to suppose.



XVI.

PHILEMON.

SERMON I.

AMONG the Epistles of Paul preserved in the New Testament, that to Philemon differs from all the rest in this respect, that it is a private letter, addressed to one person, or to one family, and having reference to a matter in which that person or that family were alone interested. Paul wrote letters to Timothy and to Titus, but these are not altogether of the nature of private correspondence. They consist of instructions to Timothy and Titus as ministers of the gospel: addressed to individuals, their contents are intended for all Christian churches. There is nothing of this general character in the Epistle to Philemon. When we read the biography of some remarkable person, and find in it very many of his letters, we can scarcely suppress the wish that some competent person had thus industriously collected and preserved all that could be collected and preserved

of Paul's correspondence, his letters addressed to churches, and those like this addressed to personal friends. It is quite a mistake to suppose that the New Testament contains all that he wrote. There are in the extant letters passages which refer evidently to letters that have long since been lost. It may seem strange that such letters should not have been preserved. Perhaps their disappearance may be in part accounted for by the fact, that the Christians of the apostolic age believed that the last day was near at hand, that Christ was about very shortly to return to the world, in which case it might not seem a matter of much importance to preserve all that the apostle wrote. Before another day had dawned it might be all over with the present state of things. The Lord's coming would supersede all apostolic instructions. Another and much less creditable reason may be assigned for the fewness of Paul's extant letters. He had many enemies in some of the churches. All the Jewish churches were hostile to him, and his Epistles to the Corinthians and the Galatians show that those churches were not altogether friendly to him. Writing to the Thessalonians, he solemnly charges those who receive the letter that it be read to the whole church. Why such a charge if there were not some unwillingness to do as he required ?

Churches, ministers, leading men in churches had their crotchetts, against which Paul strongly and resolutely protested, and the temptation to conceal and even to destroy his protests might be too strong to be resisted. At any rate, a great loss was sustained, and a great wrong was done, whether it were through neglect or of set purpose that many of Paul's letters were lost. Let us be thankful for such as have survived; but much as we admire him, and much as we are taught by him, we probably should admire him far more, and derive from him far more instruction, if more of his writings had been preserved. In what we have of his writings an obscure and difficult passage in one epistle is often made clear and easy by some passage in another; and how much more, then, might not Paul have been his own interpreter, if we possessed all that he wrote!

The Epistle to Philemon is short,—a hint to all writers of very long letters. John wrote two epistles of a private character, and they are considerably shorter than this to Philemon. The general drift of the epistle now before us is this:—Philemon was a Christian,—a native or at any rate an inhabitant of Colossæ. He had been converted to Christ through Paul's ministry, as we

gather from the nineteenth verse, ‘Albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self.’ Colossæ was situated not very far from Ephesus, where Paul ministered for three years, and where there is reason to suppose he made frequent short journeys to the various towns round about. So long a stay as three years is very unlike Paul’s general habit, and can scarcely be accounted for unless he made Ephesus the centre of a work, that in its circumference extended over a large district of what was then a very thickly peopled country. In this way Philemon might come under Paul’s influence, and be led to the adoption of the faith which Paul preached. [Paul thought very highly of Philemon. He calls him his beloved fellow-labourer.] Epaphras appears to have been the great preacher of the gospel in Colossæ, and of him Paul writes in the Epistle to the Colossians, giving him great praise as a faithful servant of Christ. But, as I had occasion to observe last Sunday, there are silent men who are of no less service in the church than the talking men; and perhaps of the silent men Philemon was one, and not on that account a less zealous, a less laborious, a less useful fellow-worker in the Christian cause.

Though intended merely for Philemon, the

epistle is in its title addressed to Philemon, to Apphia, and to Archippus. ‘To our beloved Apphia,’ or more correctly, to Apphia our sister. There is good reason to suppose that she was Philemon’s wife. Perhaps Archippus was their son. He is probably the Archippus of whom we read in Colossians iv. 17 : ‘And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.’ Here there seems to be on Paul’s part some misgiving as to Archippus and his work, however in the text he honours him by calling him his fellow-soldier. Perhaps during Paul’s ministry in and around Ephesus, Archippus had accompanied him and done good service in fighting the good fight of faith against the many adversaries whom the apostle met with in those parts. But Paul would be remembered not only by Philemon, by Apphia, and by Archippus ; he adds, ‘the church in thy house.’ [The private abodes of Christians were probably the places in which the Christian churches of that age most frequently met. The church of Colossæ met in the house of Philemon, the church of Laodicea in the house of Nymphas, the church of Philippi in the house of Lydia, the church of Rome in the house of Aquila and Priscilla. Those whose houses were thrown open for such

a purpose were probably the wealthier members of the church, or members who for some other reason occupied rather extensive premises. It is worthy of notice that there is no example of any building being dedicated to the sole purpose of Christian worship before the third century. The climate of those countries in which the gospel was then preached did not demand such buildings, and the number of Christians in each place was small. When they were too numerous to be accommodated in one house, they probably met in several. Perhaps the disadvantages were great, the inconveniences many, but the Church continued for more than two hundred years to get on without any edifice of a public character consecrated to its work.) It got on, and got on perhaps better than it ever did, after the practice of erecting ecclesiastical structures was established. And this should be a hint to those good people who think that so much depends upon there being a building of such a style, in such a locality, and in such a position relatively to the points of the compass. The Church did better without these luxuries than it ever has done with them. Well, Here we see something of Philemon's value as a fellow-worker, which quite agrees with Paul's description of him. Perhaps he could not preach, could not even trust

himself to make audible prayer in the assembling of the church, but he threw open to the church the doors of his house, and we may well suppose that he made many costly alterations in his house to fit it, or a part of it, for this new purpose. And I would not forget his good wife Apphia, for to her, perhaps, the inconvenience would be greatest. If she took a pride in her house, as every woman ought to do,—and I think that womanly house-pride among the poor would do a great deal more for their dwellings than can be done either by legislation or philanthropy,—if Apphia took a pride in her house, she must have been a zealous self-denying Christian to submit to having the house arranged for the convenience of the church, for the reception, perhaps not once or twice a week, but every day, of a large number of people assembling to hold their meetings.]

The letter is written to Philemon, although these other names appear incidentally, and as a matter of courtesy and friendship. And the object of this letter was this: Philemon had a slave who bore the name of Onesimus,—a very excellent name, for it means useful or profitable. But Onesimus had proved untrue to his name, which is not by any means an unusual occurrence. Onesimus had fled from his master. But it may be said, ‘It

is no sin on the part of a slave to secure his liberty if he can.' As Dr. Lightfoot says, 'Philosophy had pronounced Onesimus to be a "live chattel," a "live implement," and he had taken Philosophy at her word. He had done what a chattel or an implement might be expected to do.' There is nothing more sinful in his running away than in a horse's running away. The law said he had no rights, and he therefore declined to undertake any responsibilities. As a slave, however, he had not been treated with greater inhumanity than fell to the lot of his class. On the contrary, the character of Philemon may be regarded as some guarantee for kindness, although one cannot say that all Christian masters are kind to their servants; but an eminently good man like Philemon, although according to the custom of his age and country he held slaves, or held that one if no more,—an eminently good man like him would not treat his slaves with barbarous cruelty. Onesimus seems to have made no complaint to Paul of Philemon's treatment of him. He was willing and not afraid to return, and this of itself, I think, conclusively proves that he had not been ill-treated; that, on the contrary, he had experienced much of that leniency and indulgence, sometimes very foolish indulgence, shown by masters to their slaves. Why, then, had he run

away? Not because his master had been cruel to him, not because he so highly prized freedom, for his willingness to return is at variance with both these suppositions. But he appears to have pilfered his master's property. Paul writes thus, and you will observe how carefully Paul words the sentence (ver. 18), 'If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account.' Paul no doubt knew that Onesimus had laid his hands on what belonged to Philemon; but then why the *if*? Because Paul knew, as we know, that even granting that Onesimus had taken Philemon's money, it was doubtful whether the act was wrong. Philemon owed Onesimus far more than it is likely Onesimus took. Philemon owed Onesimus full wages for every day's work that he had done for him, and Paul seems to hesitate, not quite willing to admit that what Onesimus had done was wrong, and certainly there was much to say on the poor slave's behalf. Onesimus, however, had probably no high intellectual or moral views as to the iniquity of slavery, or as to his rights as a man.

He had robbed his master, and to escape punishment had run away. He had made for Rome, whither the worst characters in the world most commonly repaired, until Rome sank beneath the burden of their crimes. He had made for Rome,

partly because there he would be safest from detection, and partly, we may suppose, because there he could spend his plunder in ways most agreeable to him. The amount might not be great, but to him, a slave, it might seem vast and inexhaustible. Among ourselves it is no uncommon thing to meet with a simple young man, who, having been so unfortunate as to come in for £500 or £1000, thinks it will last for ever, and lives in riot and excess, which £5000 a year would not stand. In Rome, Onesimus would scarcely be half a day before meeting with old and practised rogues, who could read him through and through, who could perfectly understand him ; his provincial dress and provincial speech, his manner as he gaped at the wonderful sights of the world's metropolis, would attract the fowlers, men and women, who would set their snares and catch him, and rob him of all that he had before he knew where he was. This sort of thing, which goes on constantly here in Liverpool, was, we may be sure, equally common in Rome. There then he was, probably without a penny, and in rags.

In some wiser hour he had heard that Paul was in Rome. He had probably seen him at his Colossian master's house, he had heard him spoken of with ardent affection and reverence. Probably Paul had treated him with kindness when

he visited Philemon. He might have inferred Paul's sympathy with him and his class from hearing him declare his favourite and great doctrine, that in Christ there is neither bond nor free. Perhaps it was with much difficulty that the poor outcast discovered Paul in Rome. He had no doubt heard Philemon and Apphia and Archippus speak of him as being a prisoner there, but there might be hundreds of prisoners there. Yet, 'where there's a will, there's a way.' Observing carefully all whom he saw, and making frequent inquiry, he found some clue, met with some Christian perhaps, and so made his way to Paul in his own hired house. And there the runaway slave found that that doctrine, neither bond nor free, was not with Paul mere talk, a fine sentiment and nothing more. The bondsman was kindly received by the apostle, who was a free citizen of Rome.

From what we know of Paul, we cannot doubt that he saw to the material wants of the poor wretch who had fled to him for refuge. He would have him fed and clothed, and he appears to have taken him to be an inmate of his house. I gather this from what he writes in the thirteenth verse, 'Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel.' And Onesimus was converted,

perhaps more through Paul's kindness than through his preaching. He was converted, for in the Epistle to the Colossians, Paul calls him a faithful and beloved brother. Paul felt that he might have retained Onesimus in his service and in the service of the church at Rome; but he wished to have the whole case settled with regard to the feelings and the rights of Philemon. 'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's servant' is a clause in the tenth commandment, and Paul considered that Onesimus was still Philemon's servant—Philemon's slave. Onesimus has confessed his fault, and therefore Paul would have him go and acknowledge it to the man whom he had wronged. And Onesimus was willing to go. Now, this fact bears witness to one of two things, perhaps to both. At that time Roman law had imposed no limit upon the master's power over the slave. The punishments inflicted upon the slave by an angry and tyrannical master were terrible; for offences lighter than that of which Onesimus had been guilty, multitudes of slaves were crucified. That was Philemon's power over Onesimus, should he ever get him into his hands. Well, then, here was a fine proof of the slave's sincere repentance and thorough conversion; he was willing to return, knowing that his master might put him to death

in any cruel way he might choose. Onesimus was willing to die, rather than shrink from the duty of asking forgiveness of him whom he had wronged, and of making such restitution as was in his power. But may we not suppose that Onesimus' courage was helped by his knowledge of his master's character? Indeed, we cannot suppose that Paul would have recommended the slave's return unless he had been very sure that, although Philemon might show some displeasure, he would not take away his penitent slave's life.

And it was a good thing for Philemon that Onesimus should return. I do not mean that thus he again received the service of the man, but he was thus taught a grand lesson of forgiveness. Onesimus would go and confess his wrong-doing; Philemon had the power of life and death over him. In that age, and in the then existing state of society, it was a wonderful exercise of forbearance if the slave were not mercilessly punished. And when Philemon found, as no doubt he did find, that he could exercise that forbearance, that he could forgive Onesimus with all his heart, it would be a satisfaction to him, it would show him that he was not deceiving himself in calling himself a Christian, that he really was what he professed to be.

And again, observe what a lesson this would be to all slave-owners in the Roman world. Naturally enough, that doctrine preached by Paul—in Christ there is neither bond nor free, no difference between the slave and the master,—naturally enough, that doctrine would be regarded as dangerous, revolutionary, calculated to produce revolt on the part of the slaves. But now in this case of Philemon and Onesimus, what do we see,—what did all the slaves and slave-owners who heard of the incident, what did they see? They saw that under the marvellously transforming power of Christian teaching and Christian principle, a slave who had forfeited all legal right to live, went back willingly, went back and entirely submitted himself to his master. And thus it was shown that Christianity, however it might seem to threaten revolution and rebellion on the part of the slaves, made them better servants than they had been before their conversion.

Such is the general tenor and design of this singular epistle. I shall have something to say more in detail next Sunday morning. Short as it is, there is much in it well worthy of notice; much in the high Christian character given of Philemon, and much in the manner in which Paul pleads the cause of Onesimus, telling Philemon that he loves him, and that he hopes that, for his sake, Philemon

will love him, and that he will serve him no longer as a slave, but as a brother beloved, that not as master and slave, but as brothers they should be to each other for ever.

There is no other part of the New Testament in which we find so near an approach to the difficult and delicate subject of slavery, for difficult and delicate it certainly was in those days, when the great majority of the public were slaves ; the free men, fewer in number, were in mortal dread of them, held a firm hand upon them, and regarded as far worse than any profaneness, or heresy, or treason, any and every doctrine which gave or seemed to give to the enslaved a single right of citizenship, or even of humanity. Well might Paul say, ‘All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient.’ It was lawful for him and for all other Christian teachers to proclaim, in the plainest and strongest terms, the right of every human being to life and freedom and the enjoyment of happiness ; but as to the expediency of such a course, we can judge by the consideration of the unquestionable fact, that such teachings would have involved masters and slaves all over the world in wars of mutual extermination, and would have quenched the light of the gospel in a sea of blood. No ; Paul’s method was the wisest and the

best—not loud insistence upon right, but patient submission to wrong. Not Onesimus and liberty in Rome, but Onesimus voluntarily returning to servitude in Colossæ. This was the sort of thing that baffled and confounded the slave-owning world of that age, and of many subsequent ages. And not men like Philemon only, but all men holding slaves gradually learned that liberty and justice and kindness to those in their employ were more to their advantage than any amount of bondage, unrighteousness, and cruelty. Christianity was to break every yoke; but here, in the first distinct action of its contest with slavery, it repaired the yoke which the slave had broken, and sent him back to bondage. Well, as the proverb says, the longest way round is often the shortest way home. So it was in regard to the abolition of slavery, and what seemed to sanction the system was in fact destroying it, and in time brought about its destruction; and so, when the accursed iniquity of thraldom encounters the gospel of Christ, its doom is sealed, and sooner or later it must perish.

XVII.

PHILEMON.

SERMON II.

LAST Sunday morning I endeavoured to give a general account of this short epistle, of the persons mentioned in it, and of its main purpose. This morning I shall ask your attention to a few matters of detail which seem to be well worthy of notice, and with this discourse my exposition of the epistle will end.

Let me briefly sum up the subject of last Sunday morning's remarks. This is the only private letter written by Paul that has come down to us ; it was addressed to a Christian man named Philemon who lived at Colossæ, a city of Phrygia, in what we call Asia Minor. Philemon had a slave named Onesimus, who had robbed him and run off to Rome, where, when he found Paul, or Paul found him, he was converted to Christianity ; and Paul wrote this letter for the purpose of securing for the repentant slave on his return a merciful

reception from his offended master. Such are the facts of the case, and we may now proceed to examine the manner in which these facts are stated by the apostle.

After the usual word of Christian salutation addressed to Philemon, to Apphia, probably his wife, to Archippus, probably his son, and to the church, the congregation of Christians that was accustomed to meet in Philemon's house, Paul writes what is highly to Philemon's honour: 'I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, hearing of thy love and faith which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints, that the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.'

The virtue which in an especial manner Paul ascribes to Philemon is hospitality. Such a characteristic might be inferred from the fact that the church met in his house. There was no small measure of hospitality in that arrangement. Unless that church were very unlike most others, there would be some rather disagreeable people in it, some very ignorant, some of very uncultivated manners, and probably a considerable proportion of them were slaves. But Philemon cordially welcomed them all in his faith toward the Lord

Jesus, and his love to all saints. He appears to have been a man well to do in the world, and there is good reason to suppose that he was generous in his bounty to the poor. ‘Their bowels were refreshed’ by him. They found in him a sympathizing friend, whose religion consisted mainly in doing good to such as were in need. He was not a Jew ; he had not been instructed and trained in those Old Testament Scriptures which extol so highly the virtue of almsgiving ; he had not been brought up among people accustomed to kind actions. He was a Gentile ; he had never before his conversion to Christ had any idea of hospitality or kindness beyond the extension of them to intimate friends. And the change wrought in him by his conversion must have led some of his heathen neighbours to reflection, and must have been a better and more moving testimony to the gospel than anything Philemon could have preached, however eloquent he might have been.]

Paul thanked God for Philemon, and he had good reason to do so. He does not thank Philemon. In such a course there would have been the appearance of flattery ; besides which, to thank Philemon would be to ascribe his qualities to himself, whereas it was all of God’s grace, which had inclined his heart to such good works. And a Christian of

high-toned spirituality does not like to be thanked for any kind deed ; he feels that to accept such thanks is to take to himself the glory that is due to God alone. His maxim is, By the grace of God, I am what I am. He feels, with regard to all praise accorded to him, something of what Paul and Barnabas felt when the people of Lystra would have done sacrifice to them. But there is ground for much thankfulness to God when Christian men bear the character that was borne by Philemon. Not only are they useful for the aid that they afford to Christian people and to Christian works ; their chief value consists of the testimony which they render to the power of the gospel in conquering selfishness, in leading a man to think more of other people's wants and interests than of his own. And their example is of no small service. I turn to the Epistle to the Colossians, the church of which Philemon was a member, and I find Paul thanking God for their love to all saints. The example of Philemon had not been without effect upon the church ; it had pointed them to love and to good works.

In the eighth verse Paul proceeds to state the main purpose of his writing. The apostle had a right with all boldness to enjoin, to command that which was convenient, that which was befitting,

that which Philemon ought to do. That which is convenient, as we read in our Authorized Version, is a phrase by no means strong enough. It seems to give the idea that, if a thing be inconvenient, we may be excused from doing it. Whereas a large proportion of the highest duties of life, secular as well as religious, are highly inconvenient. Much more in accordance with the meaning of the original is the rendering given in one of our older versions, ‘I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee what it is thy duty to do.’ Paul had a right to be thus bold, because Philemon had been converted through his preaching, and was greatly indebted to him. But Paul had too much common sense and knowledge of human nature to insist upon his right to enjoin. He knew that what he wished Philemon to do, if made a matter of command, might kindle Philemon’s resentment. His boldness in enjoining might end in the frustration of his purpose. A command to receive, to forgive, to treat as a brother, the slave who had wronged him, robbed him, and run away from him—that was a command which even a good man like Philemon might consider an impertinence. And so Paul will not command authoritatively; he will for love’s sake beseech. In many instances, if we wish to succeed in a purpose, this is the way to success. Is it not

very much wiser first to try the gentle method of persuasion, though possibly more vigorous measures must be used in some cases. There is a most valuable lesson for Christian ministers in Paul's appeal to Philemon. Some ministers, by no means apostolic either in authority, or in gifts, or in character, are very prone to stand upon their rights, to enjoin rather than to beseech. In their deplorable ignorance of the stuff that men are made of, they are not aware that to command is in most cases to arouse resistance. No, do not command ; be content to entreat ; ask as a favour that which you might demand as a right, and then you will probably obtain what you wish, and perhaps far more than you ventured to expect. And in churches, the minister, through never insisting upon his own way, gets it.

'I beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.' Paul the aged,—and yet he was not very old. So far as can be ascertained, he was under sixty when he thus wrote. But perhaps his labours and his sufferings had told upon him. Some men are old at forty, some young at seventy ; and Paul, at from fifty-five to sixty, speaking of himself as an old man, seems to show to us something of the wear and tear of that active and much-enduring

life that he had lived. But there is an alternative rendering given in the margin of the Revised Version, and approved by some great scholars,—‘ Being such an one as Paul an ambassador,—an ambassador of Jesus Christ, and an ambassador in prison for Christ’s sake. And he grounds his plea upon his ambassadorial office. ‘ I am in this matter Christ’s ambassador to thee, Philemon ; the message that I send, the request that I make, is His ! ’ This seems the better rendering. Paul’s age, had he been far older than he was, had really nothing to do with the question in hand, while his office as an ambassador of Christ bore upon the question very forcibly.

‘ I beseech thee for Onesimus,’ says Paul. Now, we see the prudence and sagacity of the apostle, in approaching the subject so delicately, so gently, in a spirit not of command but of entreaty. ‘ I beseech thee for Onesimus.’ Had he written, ‘ I command thee to take Onesimus back, and not punish him, but treat him well, and love him as a brother,—had Paul written so, perhaps even so excellent a man as Philemon would have torn the letter to shreds, and cast it into the fire, while he exclaimed, ‘ No, I will have nothing more to do with the rascal ; I have had quite enough to do with him already ; and I won’t be dictated to, even

by Paul, as to the manner in which I am to deal with my servants.' But, 'I beseech thee for Onesimus;' these words disarm all opposition, and are likely to make their way to Philemon's better feelings.

And then he puts it thus, 'My son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds.' Thus Philemon is informed of his slave's conversion, and that upon the trustworthy testimony of Paul, and as a Christian man, believing that Onesimus was converted, Philemon must have felt what a great change had been wrought in the runaway slave. 'My son Onesimus,'—'whatever he is to thee, my good friend, he is a son to me. I regard him with strong affection, and I have found him affectionate to me.' 'My son, whom I have begotten in my bonds.'—The spiritual birth of that slave was one comfort that Paul had in his weary imprisonment.

'Onesimus, who in time past was unprofitable to thee.'—There is here a quaint play upon words. The name Onesimus means profitable, and Philemon had good reason to reflect, perhaps with some bitterness, on the manner in which Onesimus had belied his name. 'Profitable, indeed! Never was a man more utterly misnamed than that pilfering vagabond. He was unprofitable unto thee, he did belie his name; but now he is profitable to me.'

He is, after all, an Onesimus. He has put himself right with his name, and is true to it. ‘Profitable to me,’—serving me faithfully and affectionately.’ For Paul seems to have taken him into his employ, and he could be very useful, seeing that the apostle was kept within the walls of his own house, and yet had much connection with Christian friends outside. ‘Profitable to me and to thee,’ says Paul. ‘Now a converted man, changed in heart and life; now a diligent, honest, trustworthy man, he can be Onesimus, he can be to thee, if thou wilt take him back again. And I have sent him again, “thou therefore receive him that is mine own bowels,” or mine own heart, an object of my very warmest love, receive him as my son. Overlook what he was, forget what he was, receive him as he is; regard him as though he was in flesh and blood what he is in soul and spirit, my son. Thou wouldst gladly welcome any son of mine to thy love, so welcome Onesimus, my son in the faith!’ Such is the reception which Paul asks for Onesimus, slave as he was, and dishonest slave as he had been; receive him as my son, receive him as thy brother, receive him as myself!

Paul had some thought of keeping Onesimus with him at Rome, as we read in the thirteenth verse. ‘He is thy servant, and I had thought of

retaining him that he might do for me what I know thou thyself wouldest wert thou here. If I were in thy house at Colossæ, thou wouldest be well content that Onesimus, as one of thy servants, should minister to me; and here in Rome he is doing exactly what thou wouldest have him do were he and I with thee in Colossæ.'—Well, here again is the mention of a right, or of something very nearly equivalent to it. 'I have a spiritual claim to thy service, and I take instead the service of thy slave Onesimus.' It is the statement of something nearly equal to a right,—not a right in law, yet a right in conscience. But again, Paul will not insist upon his right. 'Without thy mind would I do nothing, that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly;' i.e. that the benefit conferred on me, shouldst thou permit Onesimus to minister unto me, might not be of necessity, not a demand which thou couldst scarcely refuse, but a matter of entire willingness. 'I do not keep him here and ask thee to release him; I send him back to thee, and if thou wilt thou shalt give him to me to minister in the bonds of the gospel.'

Having appealed to Philemon's Christian principles and feelings, Paul now waxes bolder, and says concerning Onesimus, 'For perhaps he there-

fore departed from thee for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever.' This could not be the purpose of Onesimus in departing from his master, but it might be God's purpose so to overrule evil for good. We give Joseph's brethren no credit for selling Joseph into bondage with a view to his afterwards saving them from famine ; but as Joseph said to them, 'Ye thought evil against me ; but God meant it unto good.' Man proposes, but God disposes. Nothing was further from the thought of Onesimus, when he ran away from Philemon, than the intention, or the bare idea, of returning to him ; but the providence and the grace of God brought it to pass. And now he goes back willingly, and Paul congratulates Philemon upon the fact that now he is to receive him for ever ; not now as a slave, but as a brother beloved.

Here is the secret of the gospel's power to destroy slavery, that it teaches the slave-owner to regard his slave as his brother,—his brother in Christ. So far as this doctrine was recognised by the slave-owner,—and the acceptance of the gospel was an impossibility without the acceptance of this principle,—so far as this principle was accepted, slavery, of course and of necessity, ceased to exist. The slave-owner's bondsmen became his brethren.]

Paul even goes further than to ask that Onesimus

may be received as a brother, and a brother beloved. He says, ‘If thou count me a partner ;’ that is, ‘If thou regard me as one with thee in the fellowship of the gospel, which of course Philemon did ; if thou count me as a partner, a fellow-partaker with thee in the blessings of the gospel, receive Onesimus as thou wouldest receive myself. Give him as true and hearty a welcome as thou wouldest accord to me, and I know how true and hearty a welcome that would be !’ Such is the reception which Paul asks for Onesimus, slave as he was, and dishonest slave as he had been ; ‘receive him as my son, receive him as thy brother, receive him as myself !’

But then there is the question of the slave’s dishonesty. ‘If he have wronged thee, or oweth thee ought.’ Paul speaks doubtfully, because, as I observed last Sunday, it was doubtful whether, even though Onesimus had laid hands upon his master’s money, he had wronged him. Philemon had wronged Onesimus quite as much by keeping him in servitude, and the one debt cancelled the other. But Paul won’t haggle over that question, he leaves it to Philemon’s conscience. ‘If he have wronged thee’—if, upon due consideration, thou thinkest that he oweth thee anything—‘put that on mine account ; I Paul have written it with

mine own hand, I will repay it.' But Paul was very poor, and how could he pay the amount if it were anything more than the merest trifle? Well, there would not be much difficulty about it. In one instance he speaks of himself as having nothing, and yet possessing all things. His influence among the churches in which he had preached and taught was such, that he had only to make this case known and it would soon be met. It is not a wise thing for a minister or any one else to make himself responsible for what he cannot meet without depending upon other people's generosity, and Paul's example in this instance ought to be followed very cautiously, if followed at all. However, the apostle had no reason to doubt the willingness and ability of his many Christian friends to meet such an engagement as that. But he adds, 'Albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.' Paul had been the means of Philemon's conversion: to Paul he owed, by the grace of God, his deliverance from idolatry, the forgiveness of his sins, the salvation of his soul, the hope of eternal life, and all the light, the peace, the joy of Christian life and experience. What Onesimus owed him was nothing in comparison with what he owed Paul. After this adroit reminder of his obligations to the

apostle, I do not suppose that Philemon would hold Paul accountable for the payment of what Onesimus owed him.

Paul concludes his prayer for Onesimus by expressing his assurance that Philemon will grant it. ‘Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.’ Here, again, is an instance of Paul’s wisdom. He does not flatter Philemon, but he gives him to understand that he has such a high opinion of him that he can be sure that he will do all that he, Paul, had requested, and even more. Instead of suspecting a man, give him all the credit you honestly can for what is right and good, and he is all the more likely to behave well.

Thus ends the apostle’s plea for Onesimus. How it affected Philemon we do not know; but the probability is, that he did receive Onesimus kindly, and that Onesimus served him faithfully. Probably Philemon gave him his freedom, strongly impressed by Paul’s words, ‘Receive him not now as a slave, but above a slave, a brother beloved.’

Paul had reason to hope that he should himself be liberated. ‘I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.’ Many were praying for the apostle; we may well suppose that it was the most frequent and the most fervent of all the

supplications offered by the Gentile churches, that the Apostle of the Gentiles should be delivered, and enabled to resume his glorious work. ‘I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.’ Observe the characteristic unselfishness of the man. Not, I trust that I shall be set free, that I shall again enjoy that liberty to which I have a right, and without which life is scarcely endurable, but, ‘I trust that I shall be given unto you.’ That for which chiefly he desired to be set free was the service that he might render to Christ’s people and to Christ’s cause.

And Paul, expecting that these prayers would be answered, wrote to Philemon this request, ‘But withal prepare me also a lodging.’ That Paul was acquitted and set free we know, but whether he was able to visit Colossæ we are not informed.

With a few words of Christian salutation the epistle is brought to a close. It is chiefly interesting because of its relation to slavery. ~~It~~ does not denounce the horrid institution as unjust and cruel. Such denunciation would have given ample scope for very fine talk, but it would have been useless, and worse than useless; it would have banded together all the slave-owners of the Roman world in the defence of their vested interests. No; ^{St. John} Paul is content with sowing just this one germ of

Christian truth : Receive Onesimus, not as a slave, but as a brother beloved ; and from that germ of Christian truth grew up in time the tree that has borne, and still bears, all the fruits of liberty, civil and religious, that we and other free peoples inherit and enjoy. /

XVIII.

LITTLE BETHLEHEM.

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel ; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.'—MICAH v. 2.

AT the distance of six miles south from Jerusalem, and on the road which leads from that city to Hebron, stands the village of Bethlehem, rendered famous for ever as the place in which the Saviour of the world was born. It is a town or village of very great antiquity, for it existed in the days of Jacob, and it is mentioned in the Book of Genesis. Its more ancient name appears to have been Ephratah, that is, the fruitful ; a name which it appears to have fully justified, for to this day the land in its immediate neighbourhood is very rich, and the hill on which the town is built abounds with the fig tree, the olive, and the vine. The name Bethlehem is supposed to be an attempt to translate into the Hebrew the older and Canaanitish name Ephratah.

As Ephratah signifies the fruitful, Bethlehem has a signification somewhat similar, for it means the house or the place of bread. ‘Bread Town’ would in fact be the best English translation of Bethlehem ; and I hope that I am not guilty of an absurd fancifulness, if I recognise in both these names something significant of the great fact that stands associated with the place. Ephratah means the fruitful, and there is no spot in all the world that has been so fruitful for blessings for the human race. Bethlehem means the house of bread, a most appropriate name for the place in which the Bread of Life was first given to a perishing world.

Bethlehem was not a place of any importance until the birth of Jesus made it conspicuous, and the spread of Christianity brought multitudes of pilgrims to pay a well-intentioned but superstitious reverence to the spot which may be called the cradle of the Christian religion and of modern civilization. For one thing, however, it was remarkable,—David was born there, and hence it was sometimes called the City of David.

That great prince seems to have paid very little attention to his native town ; he looked at places with the eye of a soldier, not with that of a mere sentimentalist, and finding in Jerusalem a much

stronger position, he made that his capital and his fortress. And so, after the attention which had been drawn to it by the fame of David had subsided, Bethlehem relapsed into its usual obscurity, and in the time of Micah was little among the thousands of Judah.

This expression, ‘the thousands of Judah,’ probably refers to some division of the population or of the land analogous to our word ‘hundred,’ as applied to a certain section of a county.

We do not know to what extent Micah’s prophecy directed the attention of the Jews to Bethlehem at or about the time of our Saviour’s birth; but the prophecy was believed to have reference to the Messiah, and accordingly the chief priests and scribes told Herod that there the Christ should be born, quoting this prophecy as the ground of their assertion.

The early Christians seem to have been utterly destitute of all reverence for places, however important the events by which their history was marked. Neither in the Gospels, nor in the Acts, nor in the Epistles, can we discern the faintest trace of any interest taken in a single spot which had been distinguished by any event of the Saviour’s life. They were far too much taken up with the greatness and the grandeur of spiritual

truth, to care anything at all about relics and pilgrimages. They did not even preserve the certain knowledge of the place in which Jesus was crucified. No one knows it to this day; and we may well conclude that it never will be known.

But the superstitious sentiment which dwells with such intense interest upon localities supposed to be rendered sacred by virtue of the facts which have transpired in them, arose in an age of corruption; and as a matter of course, Bethlehem absorbed much of the attention of the weak but devout multitudes who flocked to the Holy Land from all parts of the world.

And some notoriety attaches to it still, and a very flourishing trade is done in relics of various descriptions, and by means of an impudent imposture, which pretends to show the exact spot where the infant Saviour was cradled in the manger.

If anything be needed to prove that these associations connected with sacred places afford no help to the religious life, it is the well-known fact, that the inhabitants of all such places are, and ever have been, remarkable above all others for depravity and untruthfulness, and almost every other vice that can degrade human nature; and there is far more of true religion, of Christian spirit and

Christian conduct in the busy streets of London, than in those scenes which the life of Christ has clothed with so much interest.

Mary the mother of Jesus and her husband Joseph lived, not at Bethlehem, but at Nazareth, a town in Galilee. So say the evangelists, and in this fact we have one of many subsequent evidences of truthfulness with which the Gospels abound. For, if these writings be fictitious, why should the writers trouble themselves to invent a maiden in Nazareth, and to get up the irrelevant story of the circumstances which brought Mary to Bethlehem, and led to her Son's being born there ? The prophecy said that Christ should be born at Bethlehem. Why not, then, represent Mary as dwelling at Bethlehem from her childhood ? Nothing seems more improbable than the selection of a maiden in Nazareth, more especially as Nazareth was the vilest place in Galilee, and Galilee itself was utterly despised and detested by the whole Jewish nation. Nazareth was proverbially bad—‘Can any good thing come out of Nazareth ?’ Now, what but fact, and a determination to state and not to suppress fact, could ever have induced the evangelists to tell the world of any, even the remotest connection between Jesus and Nazareth, when Nazareth had obtained such an

infamous notoriety, when there was nothing in prophecy requiring a connection with the place on the part of the expected Christ, when, on the contrary, Bethlehem in Judea was expressly specified as the birthplace of the Messiah? If the Gospels were fictions, there certainly would be no mention of Nazareth; and if the Gospels, though not pure fictions, which few can imagine them to be, are but exaggerated and interested representations of facts, which some account them to be, in this case also it is very certain that all Christ's connection with Nazareth would have been carefully suppressed.

If the object of the evangelists were to glorify Jesus, and at any cost to exalt Him in the estimation of the Jewish people, they could scarcely have adopted a course more likely to frustrate their design, than that which they have adopted in making the despised Galilee, and especially the proverbially vile Nazareth, so prominent in their histories.

Mary lived in Nazareth, but just about the time of our Lord's birth a census of the Roman empire was being taken, a decree had gone out from Cæsar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. In this pompous and exaggerated style the Romans spoke of their domains, and the evangelist merely

makes use of the phraseology current in his time ; and here we find an explanation and justification of the fact, that the Apostle Paul speaks of the gospel as having come into all the world. It may be captiously objected that the gospel at that time had made very little progress in the world, and this is true enough in our sense of the term world ; but the gospel had made very considerable progress in the Roman empire, and in each great division of that empire, the Asiatic, the African, and the European ; and therefore Paul, speaking as a Roman citizen, was perfectly justified in ascribing to the gospel such progress, in saying that it had come into all the world. The taxing of which we read in the Gospels seems to have been simply a census, an enrolment ; for the Roman government, like other governments, wanted to know the number of its subjects. But why should Joseph and Mary be required to proceed from Nazareth to Bethlehem on account of that census ? why could not their names have been taken in the town in which they resided ? The reason was obviously this, that Herod, to whom of course the work was entrusted, adopted the Jewish custom, which was to number the people according to the tribes to which they belonged.

Here, again, we have a singular illustration of the

simple truthfulness of the entire narrative. A Roman census taken by a Jewish prince would be taken in this rather cumbrous and inconvenient manner, just as Luke expresses it, ‘All went to be taxed, every one to his own city.’

Under these circumstances, all the inhabitants of Bethlehem who were not natives of it would for the time leave it, and all the natives of Bethlehem who had left it would for a time return.

But Bethlehem was one of those quiet, slow places likely to be more distinguished by emigration than by immigration. Her sons and daughters would go to busier towns, and therefore the influx would be very considerable, would probably far exceed the accommodation afforded by the place ; and accordingly, when Joseph and Mary arrived, as they were very poor people, there was no room for them in the inn, and they had not the means to provide a lodging, and so were fain to put up with such accommodation as might be afforded by the stable or other out-buildings, in which the cattle were sheltered, and there the Saviour of the world was born.

Let me call your attention to what I may term the *naïveté*, the guilelessness of this narrative. It is not got up for effect. One evangelist might be disposed to make Christ’s birthplace a royal palace,

but we can quite imagine another going to the opposite extreme, and writing the story of the stable and the manger, that the contrast between the glory and the humiliation of the Saviour might be the more apparent. We can quite imagine the existence of a disposition to make a show and a boast of this very humble beginning of Christ's life. But there is nothing of show or of vaunting here. Neither Matthew, nor Mark, nor John makes the slightest allusion to the circumstance. It is mentioned only by Luke, and mentioned by him in connection with circumstances which naturally enough lead to it,—the limited resources of Bethlehem, the unusual throng of people there at the time, and the extreme poverty of Joseph and Mary. This, then, was the beginning of that wondrous life ; the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, born in a cattle-shed, in the midst of the multitude of beasts that had brought the Bethlehemitæ to their native town.

Perhaps this is the most fitting occasion to make a few remarks on the mysterious incarnation of our Lord. He is spoken of as the Son of God, as God manifest in the flesh, as the only-begotten Son of God. Now, where could such an idea as this have arisen ? If it had been entertained by the Jews in their expectations of the Christ, we could perhaps

easily account for the prominence that is given to it in the New Testament. But this was not the case. Although the divine incarnation had been foretold by the prophets, their predictions on this subject had been explained away, or altogether neglected.

The Jews did not look for the Son of God, or for God incarnate. They expected a great, and mighty, and good man, and they expected nothing more. Their doctrine of the unity and the spirituality of God was entirely opposed to the idea of the incarnation ; in fact, they regarded such an idea as an atrocious and dreadful blasphemy.

Under these circumstances, the apostles and the evangelists, who, with the exception of Luke, were Jews, were certainly not likely to invent the idea and the story of the incarnation ; such an idea and such a story were diametrically opposed to all the opinions and the feelings of their countrymen. The apostles and evangelists tell us that Jesus is more than man ; that He is God and man ; that He is the Eternal Word, made flesh and dwelling among us ; and we really can assign no reason for their speaking thus, unless they spoke what they earnestly believed to be true, and they would not all have accepted it as truth without good reason for such belief. Happily, however, we are not

dependent upon what they say in reference to this subject. Suppose that there was not in all the New Testament a single statement to the effect that Jesus was other than man, or that anything miraculous marked His incoming into the world, still a careful study of Christ would, I think, leave upon most minds the conviction of His divine power and Godhead. I do not refer to His miracles, for miracles are ascribed to Moses and Elijah and others whom we regard as merely men ; so that the miracles wrought by Christ can scarcely be taken as proof of His deity, though there was much in the nature of these miracles, and in the manner in which He wrought them, that corroborates His claim to divine honour.

But the great proof that Jesus is divine is to be found neither in the various statements to that effect, nor in the miracles which He wrought, but in His character, His spirit, His whole being, so uncontestedly and so immeasurably superior to that of every other person that ever existed in this world. The more we study Him, the more intelligently and carefully we study Him, the deeper and stronger becomes the impression that we are studying one who is man verily, and yet much more than man. And I think that, if previously to our engaging in such studies, we had never

heard of the mystery of His incarnation, but had begun to read and to reflect on the supposition of His mere humanity, we should become so astonished, so perplexed, so utterly unable to account for the glorious perfection of His character, His spirit, His speech, and His conduct, as to find at last the explanation, the only explanation, and the satisfactory explanation, in discovering that He is declared to be the Son of God, God Himself in human form and in human nature.

Instead of fighting over texts of Scripture which are said to assert His deity, but the meaning of which is sometimes fiercely disputed, the best way of arriving at a definite and strong conviction on the subject is to study the life and character of Jesus as a whole, and then see what the impression is which such study leaves upon our minds and hearts. I confess that His deity is believed in by myself, not so much because Matthew and Luke speak of the mystery of His incarnation, not so much because John speaks of Him as ‘the Word made flesh,’ not so much because Paul calls Him ‘the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express image of His person,’ as because the whole demeanour of Jesus is so obviously superhuman, so clearly in all respects divine.

Certainly this is the great mystery of godliness,

God manifest in the flesh ; but surely the mystery is just as great if you deny, as if you admit Christ's deity. For, if you deny it, then there is the mystery of such a man, as on this hypothesis Jesus must be. If it be hard to believe that He is God, it is quite as hard to him who studies Christ, to believe that He is not God. Great indeed is the mystery of this extraordinary person if He be but man. A man, a young man, the son of poor parents, brought up in one of the most vicious and wicked towns in the world, working at a manual trade, favoured with no manner of educational advantages,—that young man, in the course of three short years, by speaking to a few rude fishermen and a few poor women, and by dying on a cross, accomplishes a career which utterly revolutionizes the world, commands the allegiance of millions of loving hearts, changes the whole intellectual, political, social, and moral order of mankind, and exercises to this day a growing influence and power over the most highly civilized countries on the face of the earth. Again I say, great is the mystery, if He be God manifest in the flesh ; but just as great, if He be not. In short, the admission of His deity seems to be the only possible explanation of His character, of His work, of His influence, of His power.

And viewed in the abstract, what is there, after all, that can be reasonably objected to, or need be deemed incredible in the idea of God's thus manifesting Himself to His creature man ? Apart from this idea of the divine incarnation, we know very little of God, and He does not seem to come near us ; we are left in darkness and in doubt. From His providence we augur, not only His existence, but also His great goodness and kindness ; but this God, so good, so kind, has never shown Himself to us, never spoken to us, never done anything to gratify the inquiring mind that searches after Him, or to quiet the guilty conscience which seeks His forgiving love. Is all the world in all ages to live and die in this ignorance, this uncertainty, this dread ? Would such a state of things be consonant with the infinite wisdom and beneficence which we ascribe to God ? Surely, all things considered, God's goodness and man's need, it is not at all incredible that He should reveal Himself to us in some way dearer, more definite, more satisfactory than that in which, after a sort, He makes Himself known through nature and providence. I submit that the incredible thing is, not that God should so manifest Himself, but that He should not so manifest Himself. A God, a wise and righteous and merciful God, and yet a

God whose voice is never heard, who always hides Himself so completely that many of His creatures doubt even His existence,—this, I think, is a mystery, a most fearful mystery, a mystery surely more mysterious far than a God who, in accordance with the mental and spiritual necessities of His creatures, has manifested Himself in the person of Jesus Christ. God manifest in the flesh is a mystery, but a mystery that explains and opens up a great deal that is much more mysterious.

Yes, the study of Jesus Christ is the study of God ; He and the Father are one. He that hath seen Him hath seen the Father, and this it is that gives to Christ and to Christianity their chief interest and chief value. I wish to impress upon my hearers the importance of our identifying God and Christ, of our seeing God in Christ. Thus, and thus only, can you comprehend the words that fell from His lips, and the works that were wrought by His hands. It is God who speaks, it is God who works. Thus, and thus only, can you comprehend the sacrifice of the cross. It is God who makes Himself the sacrifice, and does not make a man a sacrifice in His stead. It is not God exacting from another the penalty of sin, but God exacting it of Himself. It is not God finding a substitute for us, but Himself becoming our sub-

stitute, and giving Himself for us. This is the mystery of Calvary—God made flesh, and in the flesh suffering for sinful man.

And now, regarding that infant in the manger at Bethlehem as none other than the incarnate God, we cannot feel greatly astonished when we read of the wonderful incidents which occurred at or near the time of His birth.

Luke tells us that there were shepherds abiding in the fields, and keeping watch over their flocks by night, and that to them the angels of the Lord appeared, and said : ‘I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people ; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.’ The birth of a man ever so good or great would scarcely have been signalized in this manner ; but the incarnation of the Deity might well call forth this expression of wonder and of gladness on the part of the heavenly hosts. The very words in which the birth of Christ is announced indicate His deity, ‘To you is born a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord ;’ and this word ‘Lord,’ whatever subdued and modified meaning it may bear amongst us, this word ‘Lord, uttered by an angel, could mean none other than Jehovah. And well did the song of the heavenly host express in all its fulness the great fact that

had just come to pass: ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men.’ Of the peace on earth and the good-will to men, which were shown forth in Christ’s mission, I need not speak at any length. Peace on earth, peace with God, as the token of God’s good-will to men, this was the object of our Saviour’s coming into the world. But His coming was also glory to God in the highest. God never was more glorified than then, when as the incarnate Christ He lay in that humble manger. Great men are never greater than when, under a sense of duty, or prompted by benevolence, they stoop to lowest service on behalf of their fellow-men; and God never showed Himself greater than when His love brought Him down to the lowliest position that even this low world can offer.

It is very remarkable that Luke, who was a Gentile, alone tells us that the birth of Jesus was, through angels, made known to Jews; and that Matthew, who was a Jew, alone tells us that the birth of Jesus was, through a star, made known to the Gentiles. This is not what we should look for; it certainly is not what we should find if the narratives were fabrications, or if the writers had prevaricated, or coloured their statements according to their own predilections or prejudices. We find

in Luke what we should under such circumstances have expected to find in Matthew, and in Matthew what we should have expected in Luke. Singular this, that the most intensely Jewish of all the Gospels, the Gospel that seems to have been written originally only for the Jews, should be the only one that contains this intimation of the interest which the Gentiles felt in the Messiah. If it only had been otherwise, if this account of the wise men from the East had appeared, not in Matthew but in Luke, and that account of the angel's message to the shepherds had appeared, not in Luke but in Matthew, with what eagerness the rationalists and other sceptics would have pounced upon the fact, and proved by it, that as a Jewish evangelist had invented the story of the shepherds of Bethlehem, this Gentile evangelist, Luke, not to be outdone, invented the story of the wise men and the star ! The mere fact that this incident is recorded by the intensely Jewish evangelist goes far towards establishing its truth. How these wise men were guided, we do not know. Astronomy has been appealed to, and the movements of the planets have been traced backwards with great care, to ascertain whether there was not at the time some remarkable conjunction of planets, which might lead the astrologizing magi to suppose that some

extraordinary person was about to come into the world.

But these calculations do not seem to have led to any satisfactory result; nothing is gained by the attempt to eliminate the supernatural from the evangelical narrative. Nothing is gained, but a good deal is lost, for either the veracity or the intelligence of the evangelists is hopelessly compromised, when the miraculous is explained away after the rationalistic fashion.

On the supposition that Christianity is true, then, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the greatest and most wonderful of facts took place, and the event came to pass which was to change the whole course of the world. On this supposition, it is not astonishing that some preternatural sign should be given to the Gentiles, who, equally with the Jews, had an interest in the Saviour of mankind.

And so the wise men came: wise indeed, for this is ever the truest wisdom, to come to Christ. They came with their gifts, the gold, the frankincense, and the myrrh. Representatives of the Gentile world, they worshipped as the Christ of God, that infant in the manger.

And now glance for a moment at the whole narrative, and look if it be in accordance with that

which, whether true or false, is certainly the doctrine of the Scriptures, God manifest in the flesh, and manifested under such circumstances of poverty and humiliation as these. It is too extraordinary to be false, it is much too far removed from all the ideas which men had formed concerning the Christ to be a fiction; it seems, indeed, utterly incapable of explanation on any principle, excepting that which regards this narrative as a plain, an unvarnished, a faithful narrative of facts.

Dcl 20

XIX.

‘ALL JOY AND PEACE IN BELIEVING.’

‘Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.
—ROM. xv. 13.

THE world is full of complainings that life is very joyless and unquiet, that it is all vanity and vexation of spirit, full of sorrow and care. There are some Christian people, too, who seem to know very little of joy or peace. Many of the hymns they sing are doleful in the extreme, expressive of much dejection, much fear, much discomfort of soul. And ministers of religion sometimes do very little to cheer the hearts of their anxious and downcast hearers, for their preaching is often of a very melancholy description.

And the measures resorted to by most men to obtain joy and peace are, in the main, failures. The pursuit of wealth, of knowledge, of pleasure, of popular applause,—all are tried; but however much money may be acquired, however much knowledge may be gained, however much pleasure may be indulged in, however much popularity commanded, still there is no joy, no peace.

(Some in sheer despondence are asking the strange question, 'Is life worth living?' And those who ask this dismal question are not persons upon whom poverty, sickness, hard work, the infirmities of age, and other ills of life press heavily. It is not only, nor chiefly, the man who scarcely knows how to get bread to eat, nor the man who has long been tormented with disease, nor the man who has to toil like a slave, literally earning his bread in the sweat of his brow, nor the man who is burdened with the weight of many years; it is not only nor chiefly these, or such as these, who are in so despairing a condition. No; the question, 'Is life worth living?' is asked by the rich, by the healthy, by the people who have abundance of leisure, and, saddest of all, it is asked by young people. And it betrays a very unwholesome state of mind.)

Now, for all this joylessness and disquiet a remedy is provided. If there be joy and peace in nothing else, there is joy and peace in believing. It is not God's design that men should be miserable, either in this world or in the world to come. It is rather His will that they should have joy and peace, that they should have all joy and peace, that they should be filled with all joy and peace, which, though they cannot be found in health, or riches,

or knowledge, or power, or pleasure, can be found in believing.

‘Joy and peace in believing.’

Believing in what? it may be asked. To which I answer, believing in God, and in God’s attributes of wisdom, and righteousness, and goodness, and in God’s Word as given to us in the Scriptures. And this believing in God implies, of course, believing in His Son, Jesus Christ; believing in His teaching, in His power, in His work.

Believing is a word that may apply to ten thousand things; and, of course, there are ten thousand things, belief in which will ensure neither joy nor peace, but may, indeed, produce just the contrary effect. But in the Scripture, this word believing means believing in God, and in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As our Lord Himself says, ‘Ye believe in God, believe also in Me.’ In Scripture, Christians are often called believers without any explanation of what they believed, it being understood that they are believers in God and in Jesus Christ, His Son. And so, when we speak of a man’s belief, though the expression might have reference to his political opinions, or to his convictions upon any other secular matter, yet we almost invariably understand by his religious belief, his belief concerning God.

Some one may say, ‘I do not see much likelihood of feeling joy and peace in such believing as that. On the contrary, such believing seems more likely to increase my despondency and my fears. For believing in God implies believing in a judgment to come, implies believing that sin will be punished, implies believing that it is my duty to do many things which I do not like to do, and to abstain from doing many things that I greatly wish to do. How can I find joy and peace in believing that which I feel to be so unwelcome ?’

And some, thinking that belief in God can only produce disquiet and dread, fearing that belief in God must be destructive of all cheerfulness, and must make life gloomy, think that if they are to have joy and peace, the less they believe in God, the less they think of Him, the better. And so they set out to look for joy and peace on this principle, that there is no God, no judgment, no world to come, nothing to hope, nothing to fear, nothing to thwart them in their desire to enjoy themselves according to the bent of their own inclinations. ‘Joy and peace in believing?’ say they ; ‘no, we are more likely to find joy and peace in the negation of all religious belief!’ And so they go their own way, and though they promise themselves liberty, they find themselves the

servants of corruption, and in their search for joy and peace they miserably fail.

It does seem strange to some minds that we should speak of feeling joy and peace in believing what the Scriptures teach us to believe. But this, at any rate, is true, that the Scriptures promise us joy and peace in thus believing. ‘Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusted in Thee.’ Again and again we read, ‘Blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee !’ Jesus says, ‘Peace I leave with you ; My peace I give unto you.’ Again He says, ‘These things have I spoken unto you that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.’ And yet again, ‘I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.’ Paul writing to the Philippians says, ‘The peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.’ Peter speaks of believers as ‘rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory.’

Joy and peace in believing or by believing, believing in God, believing in Christ, are most certainly promised again and again in the Word of God. What does the word ‘gospel’ itself mean ? Let it be interpreted by the angel who, when our Saviour was born, said to the shepherds, ‘Behold, I

bring you glad tidings of great joy.' In believing, then, in such believing as is referred to in our text, we are certainly taught to expect joy and peace.

There are also words which speak of trial, of tribulation, of great tribulation, as resulting from this belief; and under some circumstances this belief does bring much trouble. It shut up Daniel in the lions' den, and cast his three friends into the fiery furnace; it cost James the apostle his life, and Stephen through believing was stoned to death. Yet, taken as a whole, the testimony of Scripture is to this effect, that believing in God and in His gospel, we shall have joy and peace, we shall be filled with joy and peace. And even such exceptions as I have named are really not exceptions. For to them, even in the hour of tribulation, the promise was fulfilled, and in the midst of their sufferings they were filled with joy and peace in believing.

In such believing there is that which ought to produce joy and peace in believing, and which really needs must produce them. It is the belief that God is love; that He loves us with a father's love; that 'like as a father pitith his children, so the Lord pitith them that fear Him.' Surely this ought to fill our hearts with peace, and, more than peace, with joy. With quiet confidence we can

press on through life with all its trials, full of peace in the assurance that He who knows all and permits all is our Friend, our Father, and loves us with an everlasting love.

Then there is the belief in the full and free forgiveness of sin, in the entire removal of all guilt, in perfect freedom from all condemnation. There is belief in such words as these : 'He hath forgiven us all trespasses ;' 'His blood cleanseth from all sin ;' 'We joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the atonement ;' 'Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, and to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.'

This belief of which we speak is belief in a provision which God has made through Christ for deliverance from guilt. And joy and peace must fill the heart of him who really does hold such belief.

This belief is, further, belief in all the teaching which God has given us for life and conduct, the teaching provided by the words and the example of Christ. And the teaching believed in and carried into practice (and if it be not carried into practice it is not really believed in), this teaching, leading a man into all that is good, and keeping him out of all that is evil, making him temperate,

and pure, and truthful, and honest, and kind, and contented, surely some peace, some joy must be the result. Why is there in the world so little joy, so little peace? Mainly because there is so much sin. Take away the sin, and you take away nearly all the sorrow. The believing of which our text speaks is a believing that aims at taking away the sins, all the sins, not sparing one; and therefore its aim is to reduce to a minimum the sorrows of mankind and to fill all men with peace and joy.

Further, the believing of which we are now talking is a belief in a life to come. It is a belief in a future judgment, and, so far, might seem to be destructive of joy and peace. But it is the belief that in that judgment there will be no condemnation to them that are in Christ, that virtually the judgment in regard to them is past. Turn with me to John's Gospel, v. 24, and we read these most wonderful and blessed and consolatory words: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My words, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.' In the Revised Version we read, 'He cometh not into judgment.' You are acquitted when you believe in Christ.

You will remember that Jesus said to the man

who was sick of the palsy, but had faith that Jesus could heal him, you will remember that Jesus said, not, ‘Son, be of good cheer, thy sins shall be forgiven thee ;’ no, but ‘thy sins are forgiven thee.’ So of the sinful woman who believed in Him, and showed her faith and thankfulness by washing His feet with her tears, he said, not, ‘Her sins which are many shall be forgiven,’ but ‘they are forgiven.’ And Paul does not say, ‘God for Christ’s sake will forgive you in the day of judgment ;’ he says, He ‘hath forgiven you.’

Forgiveness is, I think, generally spoken of in Scripture as a present blessing, conferred when a sinner repents and believes ; and not as a blessing held in reserve, held conditionally, and with some uncertainty until the final decision of the judgment day. And so that day can be looked forward to by him who believes without fear, but with the peaceful certainty that he is already pardoned.

But this belief is belief not only in the day of judgment. It is belief in an everlasting life, in glory, heaven, immortality, in endless life of perfect holiness, of perfect conformity with the image of Christ, for this is God’s great purpose. Now, in looking for eternal life, many please themselves with all manner of agreeable expectations of happiness,—picturing it in all the colours

that imagination can supply. Many think of it and talk of it as a scene of endless rest, as an unceasing concert of sweet sounds, as a beautiful paradise, with rivers and streams, and trees, and flowers, and all the rest of the fine things which it is the practice to represent in characterizing heaven. But the heavenliest quality of heaven lies in the fulfilment of these words, 'Predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.' Or, as John says, 'When He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' Or, as the Psalmist said long before, 'As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness.'

Is there not then, in the nature of this belief, that which ought to fill him who stedfastly holds it with joy and peace? Belief in God's fatherly love, belief in deliverance from guilt and condemnation, belief in such teaching as leads to the holiest and happiest course of conduct in this world, belief in a future and endless life of perfect Christ-likeness! Surely, if any man have reason to be joyful and peaceful, it is the man who so believes with all his mind and heart.

And indeed in this belief there is much more that ought to give joy and peace. It is the belief in the final triumph of good over evil; in the

gradual extension of the blessings of the gospel to the whole human race; in the extinction of all that is sinful, all that is injurious. A man with such belief, whether thinking of the world's future or of his own, need have no gloomy forebodings; he can rest assured that Christ will ultimately destroy all the works of the devil. A man with such belief in his heart may grow old and draw near to death in what may be a very evil time, a time of growing superstition, and growing infidelity, and growing indifference to religion; iniquity may abound, and the love of many may wax cold; things may seem to be, and may really be, getting worse and worse. But this faith will save a man from despairing of the cause of truth and righteousness and godliness in this world. This faith will lay hold of a thousand glorious promises which assure the aged Christian that, though he must depart, and depart with little visible prospect of anything but the downfall of religion, yet it cannot fail. For God hath sworn that 'to Him every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess.'

It is said that the great statesman William Pitt died in an agony of anxious patriotism, exclaiming, 'Oh, my country!' The story is generally discredited; but be that as it may, the man who has faith in God, if he cannot be full of joy, may have

much peace in however dark and threatening a time he is called to leave the world. For he leaves it not in the poor hope that the world will perhaps take care of itself, but in the comforting assurance that it will be taken care of by God.

Once more, let this principle of joy and peace in believing be subjected to the test of experience. As I have said, all believers are not remarkable for the joyfulness and peacefulness of their character. Many of them are sad and anxious. But this results from the fact that their belief is so weak. They are people of little faith, and therefore of little joy and little peace. Or their belief may be little more than a form of godliness without the power thereof.

But for joy and peace in believing let us refer to a few well-known instances in which there were joy and peace, where there was much more reason to expect sorrow and fear.

The apostles, having been imprisoned and beaten for preaching Christ, ‘departed from the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.’ Paul and Silas were scourged, thrust into the inner dungeon of the gaol at Philippi, and their feet were made fast in the stocks. And at midnight they prayed and sang praises to God. The great Apostle of the Gentiles,

informing the Corinthians of the trouble that befel him in Asia, says, ‘Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounded by Christ.’ Looking forward to his martyrdom, he thus writes to the Philippians : ‘If I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all.’

Than Paul, no man suffered more, but never was a man’s heart more full of peace and joy than his. And we find the same principle prevailing through all the history of those who have suffered persecution for the faith of Christ. Subjected to the severest tests that could be applied, they were full of joy and peace in believing.

And we still observe the same effect of the same belief. How very striking are the ways in which trouble is borne by different persons! Here is one half frantic by reason of sore bereavement ; there is another who, enduring a loss quite as severe, is calm, strong, self-possessed, resigned. Here is one whom some affliction leads to utter nothing but

the language of discontent, and complaining, and rebellion against the will of God; and there another who is quiet, or if he speak, speaks meekly, and believes that all is ordered in wisdom and mercy. Here is one, like Job's weak and foolish wife, exclaiming in bitterness of soul, 'Curse God and die;' and there another, like Job himself, saying, 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.'

The main cause of such striking differences is, that in the one case there is little, if any, faith, while in the other there is much. And this it is that enables sufferers to endure in a submissive and patient spirit the trials of their lives.

Let those who have no faith in God, no faith in Christ, no faith in the gospel; let those unhappy people fret and complain of the world as a waste howling wilderness, let them peevishly ask, 'Is life worth living?' Those who do believe in God, in Christ, in the gospel, and believe with heart and mind and soul, experience joy, great joy, in so believing; and if there be times in which they cannot rejoice, still in their inmost soul abides peace. 'Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.'

Oh that all men knew what a store of help and comfort there is for them in this blessed faith, what joy and peace in believing, that so they might come to have some knowledge, some experience, some comprehension, however limited, of that 'peace of God which passeth all understanding.'

XX.

BAGS WITH HOLES.

‘He that earneth wages, earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.’—HAGGAI i. 6.

HAGGAI was one of the prophets who lived after the return of the Jews from their captivity in Babylonia. His prophecy is very brief, and relates almost exclusively to the building of the second temple. The express condition upon which Cyrus, moved by the Spirit of God, proclaimed liberty to the captive people was this, that, returning to their own country, they should restore the worship of God at Jerusalem, and build a temple that should occupy the place on which had stood the grand structure raised by Solomon.

The king’s proclamation is given in the opening verses of the book of Ezra: ‘Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and He hath charged me to build Him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you

of all His people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is the God) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.'

This was the chief purpose of the people's return, and perhaps this to some extent explains the fact that so few of them availed themselves of the opportunity. The opportunity was, as they might think, burdened with the responsibility of providing a new and rather costly sanctuary. Perhaps, if no such condition had been imposed, a very large proportion of the people would have gone to their own country to till the fields, to plant vineyards, to rear cattle, to build comfortable houses for themselves, and generally to prosper in the world. But such was the discouraging effect of that requirement to build the temple, that only about one sixth of the people took advantage of the king's proclamation.

However, a large number did return to their own land. But on their arrival they were very slow and very loth to enter upon the work, their pledge

of doing which was the condition of their emancipation from Babylonian thraldom. They made various excuses, to the effect that the time had not come that the Lord's house should be built. They lost no time in building houses, and, it would seem, rather sumptuous houses, for themselves. They busied themselves in agriculture ; they were very diligent and laborious in their endeavours to become rich ; but all the time the charred ruins of the house of God stood there on Mount Zion, and no one cared to remove them and to build the temple they had promised to erect in its place. Such conduct was ungrateful, such conduct was dishonest, such conduct was a shameful breach of faith and trust.

And they reaped the consequence of their sin. God withheld His blessing. They looked for much, but it came to little. A drought came upon the land ; there was famine and great distress ; no corn, no wine, no oil ; cattle perishing ; men, women, and children starving.

It was just at this critical juncture that the prophet Haggai, filled with the spirit of religious zeal, fidelity and courage, came forward to rebuke the faithless, unthankful, selfish people. He explained to them the cause of all their calamities ; it was that contempt of God shown in their refusing

to fulfil their pledge with regard to the temple and the ordinances of religion. But with the words of rebuke there were also words of consolation. The prophet encouraged the people to enter upon the work which they had in their selfishness and unthankfulness neglected. And they entered upon the work, and then God was gracious to them ; He said to them, ‘From this day will I bless you,’ and He gave them a grand promise of the Messiah’s coming.

The words which I have chosen as my text are taken from the rebuke which Haggai delivered to the people. Their first meaning is this, that in the famine, prices were so high that, even if a man did in such hard times earn wages, and high wages, the cost of food, of clothing, of everything was so great, that the money soon disappeared. It seemed to be thrown into a bag pierced with holes ; or, as we say, it was as when water is poured into a sieve.

Now, poor people have often experienced very painfully the state of things which the prophet describes in this figurative manner. There are times in which, in the first place, they find it ver hard to earn any wages at all. They are able and willing to work. They are not proud, but are prepared to do any sort of work, however menial in comparison with what they have been accus-

tomed to. But trade is dull and work is scarce ; there is next to nothing to be had, and working men tramp wearily from firm to firm, from factory to factory, from town to town, the hope of obtaining employment becoming fainter with every disappointment. It is a terrible thing for a man, especially if he have a family that looks to him for bread.

And sometimes things are so dear, that even what may be considered good wages do not go far, cannot be made to go far. And people who are well to do should consider this before they harshly judge the poor. To me it is a matter of wonder, of astonishment, a thing incomprehensible, that so many poor labouring people continue to live at all upon their scanty earnings. In many cases among steady, sober people the necessary expenses of living are so great, that the wages seem as though they were cast week by week into a bag with holes. Poor people struggling thus, deserve not censure but sympathy ; they are worthy of much praise for their patient endurance of suffering ; they ought to command kindly help from those whose lot is so very different.

In many cases, that rapid disappearance of the wages through the bag with holes is unavoidable. I dare say the most thrifty and economical are often amazed to find how rapidly the earnings go,

for this, for that, for something else; but all necessary, or almost necessary, to comfortable and decent existence.

But the bag with holes, and with very large holes, is sometimes a matter of deliberate choice. The public-house, for example, is one of those bags with holes, and very often he who earns wages puts his wages, or a large proportion of them there, and of course he never sees them again. This is the great main cause of our impoverishment. The public-house is the poorhouse in this worst sense, that it is the house that makes men poor. The working people never can be strong, either politically or socially, while so many of them put their wages into these bags with holes. Political and social strength is proportioned largely to a man's independence, and his independence is mainly in proportion to his property, for an empty sack cannot stand upright. I believe that the franchise bill ought to pass into law, and hope that it will pass; but I also believe that universal sobriety would do a hundred times more than universal suffrage in winning, consolidating, and securing for the people the power to which they are entitled as free citizens in a free state. What a great strength of intelligence, of character, of will, of purpose would be added to us but for these bags with holes

that are seen wide open at almost every street corner!

Another bag with holes into which many people put their earnings, is extravagance in pleasure. There may be much of this quite apart from what is commonly understood by intemperance. They are very brutish people who seek pleasure in intoxication, but there are other extravagances of a sort more refined. Extravagance in living beyond our means, in refusing to exercise a reasonable self-denial, in giving way to every foolish and expensive desire with regard to food, raiment, house, entertainments, travelling, and many other things that are agreeable, and for the most part innocent, yet are more than we can afford. There is too much fast living among us. I mean fast in this sense, that it makes men's earnings disappear very rapidly, leads them into debt, and 'Lying rides on debt's back,' as says the proverb. Many a man has found, by very miserable experience, that a fine house, a beautiful garden, a carriage and pair, is a bag full of holes, a continual and vexatious drain upon his resources, generally far exceeding all calculations formed beforehand. As you go up and down the country you may see a great mansion here, a racecourse there, all of them having been to some rash and unfortunate people bags with

holes. And thus thousands lead lives of anxiety, impoverishment, privation, whose experience might be so very different. And they complain, and they ask, What is the reason that the former times were better than these? I should say that, in so far as the former times were better than these, the difference is due to the fact that the men of former times were not so effeminately delicate in their habits as the present generation, that they did not keep so many wasteful servants, that they were more economical, that they rose earlier, and went about their work, and gave more time to work and less to amusement; that they were hardy and healthy and contented, living in a less pretentious and costly way. In short, the bags into which they put their earnings had not so many holes for the earnings to fall through.

Again, the prophet's words find many a vivid illustration in the conduct and experience of men who, hasting to be rich, launch out into venturesome and unsafe speculations and investments. They are easily gulled. A burnt child dreads the fire, and a scalded dog is afraid of water hot or cold, and the snare is spread in vain in the sight of any bird; but there are men of confident and sanguine temperament whom no experience of difficulties and losses can school into common sense

and common prudence. And so it comes to pass that many who are saving even to parsimoniousness are reduced to want. People should very carefully see to it that the bag is secure, that there are no holes in it. If the bag be a company that promises a large return, see that there are no holes in the calculations on which its promises are based ; see to it that there are no holes in the management of the concern ; see to it, above all, that there are no holes in the character of the directors and officials. The loss of the unfortunate speculator's money is not all, is not the worst. When his own money has run through, he is tempted to borrow, to beg, to steal other people's money, and his character is lost, and it is most likely his soul will be lost through his having had to do with such impostures and impostors. 'The sorrow of the world worketh death,' says the Scripture, and I know no sorrow of the world that worketh death more frequently, more surely, more tragically, than the sorrow, the depression, the despair brought on by difficulties and anxieties, loss and shame incurred through ill-advised endeavours to make money multiply itself rapidly in speculative concerns.

But if a man hoard and hoard, and add gains to gains, escaping all losses, conducting with

wisdom and prudence all his affairs, and becoming substantially rich, still he may all the time have been putting his earnings into a bag with holes. He grows wealthy, he dies, he leaves all, and what then? Well, then, there may be the fulfilment of Solomon's gloomy apprehensions: 'I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity. Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun. For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein, shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil.'

Those to whom the wealth is left soon make holes in the bag, and away it goes, the gatherings of a lifetime scattered and lost in a few months, or even weeks; and indeed by ingenious devices, such as the post obit, the bag may have been pierced long before the owner of it dies, the whole of its contents may be mortgaged.

And there may not be the slightest gratitude on

the part of those, even though they be sons and daughters, to whom the estate falls. I have heard of a man whose father left him an equitable share of his property, but he was so angry that more was not left him, that he never afterwards ceased to curse his father's memory. It is no uncommon case for the members of a family to quarrel, with bitter and life-long hate, over the terms of the father's will. By many it is regarded quite as a matter of course, and a matter of natural duty, that a man if he have any means should save, and save, and save for his children. I am not so sure of either the duty or the wisdom of such a course in all cases. I except cases in which the children are young, and cases in which any member of the family is infirm in body or in mind; but as a rule, it may be best that each generation should fend for itself, make its own way in the world, and not be dependent upon expectations of a fortune provided for it and not made by it. At any rate, the fortune is very often a bag with holes, and the labour of a life is lost; and worse than that, it demoralizes those for whom it was so carefully kept. A young man of high principle will desire and endeavour to be, in regard to his support, as independent of his father as he knows he must be of every one else.

But we often see the bag with holes in the endeavours which some fathers, in all kindness, make to place their children well in the world. They are sent to school to learn very little, and the money spent, not in their education but in the attempt to educate them, is almost thrown away. For to lather an ass's head is waste of soap! One is put to a profession, another to a trade, each with every chance of success that can be given him, or that he can reasonably desire; far better chances than fall to the lot of others. But there is no success. The poor lad that sweeps the office, sweeps out, with other rubbish, the son of a well-to-do father, and occupies his place. I have known the same young man set up in business by his father or other friends again and again, but to no purpose. All that was given, all that was lent, was put into a bag with holes. Thus careful and devoted parents need to see that their children shall be trained into such characters and habits, that what is done for their advantage may not be done in vain, to the parents' bitter disappointment and the children's irretrievable ruin.

The words of the text are, I think, applicable to great national follies and losses. There is no bigger bag with holes than war. The earnings of a people in millions upon millions are, generally

through the people's ignorance and pride and passion, thrown into this bag. And what is the result of it all? Sometimes a flash of military glory, but often not even that poor return. Sometimes an accession of territory, but with it endless care and cost and trouble. Generally the result is loss, loss of money, loss of life, with absolutely no compensation in any form; and the earnings have still to be put into the bag with holes, for the debt has to be paid, or, at any rate, the interest on the debt has to be paid. All this waste of money and of life would be spared if men everywhere would but accept and practise the gospel of peace, the teaching and the example of Jesus Christ. And what an immeasurable amount of good could have been done in the service of civilization and religion with the millions that have been wasted and lost in the insane and devilish business of war!

Our Saviour tells us to provide bags which wax not old. And there is no difficulty in understanding what He means, for the whole verse in which these words appear is to this effect, ‘Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.’ The bag which waxes not old, and in which there is no wasting and no loss, is

charity, alms-giving, rendering help to those who are in want and distress. This is the treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. I do not say that this is the only treasure we shall find in heaven. Were it so, heaven would be to most of us a very poor place. Christ is the great treasure there, as He is the Christian's great treasure here, the pearl of great price. Still, God is not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love : we shall in no case lose our reward, although we so little deserve it. But the treasure is not so much the money or other material help we may give. This is the treasure to the recipients ; but to the alms-giver the chief treasure is the state of mind, the disposition of heart, the habit of life which charity fosters ; the sympathy, the kindness, the usefulness, the conquest over selfishness.

Some may think that money given is money lost, and unhappily this is in some sense the case, because kindness is often imposed upon, and the alms bestowed upon the unworthy are put into a very ragged bag, riddled with holes made by indolence, and intemperance, and general misconduct. But there is this compensating thought, even when we discover that the money has been thrown away, viz. that the giving of it proves that

we are not destitute of that most excellent gift of charity. We have our treasure in the consciousness of having generously and honestly tried to do good, and that so far we are obedient to Christ, followers of His example, and partakers of His spirit. He that giveth to the poor lendeth unto the Lord. In what manner He may choose to repay the loan we cannot tell, but we are very amply compensated if the habit of giving to the poor and giving to all good and useful works abide in us, and keep us tender-hearted, sympathetic, and generous. A heart in which these graces reign is a precious treasure, whether it be in heaven or on earth.

‘It is all nonsense,’ says some one. ‘Whatever I give, I am so much the poorer. I don’t believe in your fine sentiments of spiritual compensation for material loss.’

Very well, then ; go on in your selfishness ; but I ask you to remember and to mark my words, which indeed are not mine but God’s,—the day will probably come to you, as it has come to thousands of like mind, when you will discover, to your amazement and your consternation, that while you have thought of enriching yourself, you have been putting your earnings into a bag with holes, and have nothing left, either spiritual or

material, that can give you satisfaction, or save you from despair.

There is an old epitaph which you may think deserving only of ridicule, because political economy cannot endorse it ; but I for one believe it to be profoundly true, and its truth will be made plain at the last day,—‘ What I spent, I had ; what I kept, I lost ; what I gave, I have !’

XXI.

THE GIFT OF CHRIST THE PLEDGE OF ALL OTHER GIFTS.

'He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?'—ROM. viii. 32.

THE gift of Christ the pledge of all other gifts. Such is the lesson which St. Paul would have us learn from this statement, that 'God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all,' and from the inference, 'How shall He not with Him also freely give us all things ?'

I. And first, as to the statement, 'God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.'

Now, the fact that God spared not His own Son is no evidence that He did not love Him. We have abundant testimony to the contrary. Twice at least the voice of the Father was heard from heaven saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' Our Lord Himself was perfectly satisfied that His Father loved Him, and just as He was about to undergo His last sufferings, He said

to His Father, ‘Thou lovedst Me from the foundation of the world.’ Again He says, ‘The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand.’ And, indeed, it is impossible for us to imagine any other feeling than that of the most perfect love as existing on God’s part towards our Lord Jesus Christ. Such spotless holiness, such ready and entire obedience, such delight in doing the Father’s will, could not but command the Father’s love. We cannot conceive of any paternal love so strong as that which God has, and ever has had, for his well-beloved Son. Abraham loved Isaac, and Jacob loved Benjamin, and David loved Solomon; but nowhere in the history of mankind can we discover any fatherly affection equal to that of God towards Him who is the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person. When human relations are made the emblems of divine relations, they must be understood at their best, at their very best, in all their most absolute ideal perfection. Not a father and a son at variance, not a father and a son cold and indifferent towards one another, not a father vexed by his son’s misconduct, not a son estranged by his father’s harshness, but a father and a son attached to each other in the strongest affection of which it is possible to conceive.

It was not, then, from any lack of love to Christ that God did not spare Him. And certainly He did not spare Him. He did not spare Him the deep humiliation of becoming incarnate and being made man. There is no peer nor potentate on earth who, requiring his son to become a slave, and, as a slave, to toil in the fields, would require of him such a humiliation as that to which Jesus was subjected in taking upon Him our nature and becoming one of us. And it must be remembered that this was no temporary humiliation. It was to be everlasting ; it still continues ; our Lord is still in the form of man, and that form He will never cease to bear.

But if it behoved Him to become man, He might have been spared the trials that are generally the lot of men, and trials which they very rightly deserve because of their sins. Let the one sinless Man be spared the sufferings that sinners meet with as their due. But no ! Very few, if any, are the sufferings incident to human life that Jesus was exempted from. He was not spared the endurance of poverty. Into poverty He was born, and in poverty He lived, and in poverty He died. Poorer than the foxes that had holes, and the birds of the air that had nests, He often had not where to lay His head.

~~Nor~~ was He spared temptations, but was in all points tempted like as we are. Tempted to distrust God, tempted to presumption, tempted to worldliness. And very bitter enmity was His portion. Perhaps few have been more utterly detested than He was while in the world. It is true that for a time He was popular with the multitude, but, it would seem, only as long as they thought He would provide them with loaves and fishes. But the hatred that assailed Him was intense; it expressed itself in many vile and abusive epithets, in many false accusations, in many attempts, public and private, to take away His life.

Ingratitude was another trouble that He had to endure. ‘Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?’ That was only one instance out of multitudes in which those whom He benefited showed their utter unthankfulness. His own brethren did not believe in Him, but said that He was mad, and would have kept Him under restraint like a lunatic.

~~And then at last~~ He was spared nothing that could make His sufferings terrible: the treachery of Judas; the cowardice of the other apostles; the barbarous, brutal treatment to which He was subjected by Herod, and by the soldiers under Pontius Pilate. Of all the deaths that man could

die, there was none more torturing, and none so degrading as the death of the cross ; He was not spared that. And to make it all the worse, to add to the contempt and shame, He was crucified between two thieves. Amply true are the apostle's words, 'God spared not His own Son.'

And oh, what a lesson there is here for us when trial and suffering lead us to think that God cannot love us, or He would not allow us to be so afflicted ! When our sufferings exceed those endured by His well-beloved Son, then perhaps, but certainly not before then, shall we have reason thus to interpret our trials.

And why did He not spare Him ? It seems unjust ; it seems cruel, hard, unflinching treatment of a faultless Son, to expose Him to so much sorrow, suffering, and shame, when there was ample power to avert it. He did not spare Him, because 'He delivered Him up for us all,' for Jews and Gentiles, for bond and free, for the whole human race ; for we read elsewhere that, by the grace of God, Jesus tasted death for every man.

But why should Jesus be delivered up for us ? How can His having been delivered up to suffering and death do any good to us ? The event took place ages ago, how can it affect us ? It affects us in this way, if we will believe the testimony that

He died, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, and that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life. Sin killed God's dear Son, and God said, 'It is enough; henceforth for His sake men shall be saved.' Salvation is the magnificent monument that God has erected in commemoration of the death of His Son.¶

Now, if God delivered Him up for us, it is plain that He really loves us, and loves us as He loves Him. Had he loved Christ more than us, He would have spared Him all that humiliation and suffering; He would never have delivered Him up to the cross, never! Nothing but a love as great toward us as toward Him can explain God's procedure in sending Jesus into the world to toil and suffer and die. Well may the Apostle John say, 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.' The first great truth to be learned from the fact that God did not spare Jesus, but delivered Him up for us to all that we know He endured,—the first great truth to be learned from this is God's love to us, God's love to us all. We, sinful as we are, really share with the sinless Christ in the divine love. Nothing else so teaches us the love of God, nothing! Nature and

providence abound with tokens of His favour ; but the all-convincing testimony is this, that He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.

And, as a matter of fact, it is this that has made the deepest impression of God's love upon the human mind. Kind and bountiful as are God's dealings with us in nature and providence, these do not greatly affect men with gratitude. Generally, all the thanks that God gets from man for the sunshine and the rain is grumbling that there is either too much of them or too little. Health and strength, food and raiment, recovery from illness, deliverance from danger,—we take all these things as matters of course, and perhaps are scarcely sensible of them as being proofs of God's love at all.

It is by His not sparing Christ, by His delivering Him up for us to suffering and to death, that men at last have been touched and made to feel that God does really love them as His children. There is more hope for the world, there is more chance of its having heart put into it, when through the cross of Christ all its misgivings concerning God, all its suspicions, all its terrors are dispelled, and it finds to its surprise, its relief, its infinite consolation, that God loves it.

II. And having delivered up His Son for us, 'how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?'

After the gift of Jesus Christ, every other gift is comparatively a small matter. Abraham did not spare his son Isaac, but delivered him up to God. In his mind, in his heart, he surrendered him as truly as if he had slain him and burned him on the altar. And after that proof of love to God, do you suppose Abraham possessed anything that he would have been unwilling to give. If God had asked his flocks and his herds, his silver and his gold, we may well suppose that Abraham would have given all without a murmur. And God having given us Christ, we cannot imagine Him unwilling to bestow any favour that would really be a favour. There is nothing that we can ask of God, nothing that we can desire, the bestowment of which would cost God what the gift of Christ cost Him. Whether it be orthodox or not to think of God as capable of suffering, I cannot think of Him as free from suffering when Jesus suffered. I am not the only man here who knows by experience how keen is a father's suffering as he watches the suffering and death of a beloved child. And to speak of God as the Father of Christ, and yet regard Him as not participating in His sufferings, is to me an

impossibility. What! His Beloved One on the cross and the Father unmoved! the Father's heart not wrung with anguish! The idea is perfectly monstrous. It is destructive of the whole doctrine of the divine Fatherhood. No; the gift of Christ did cost, must have cost God suffering only equalled by Christ's own sufferings. And nothing that we ask or desire can cost Him that; the bestowment of everything else is easy, as easy as had been to Abraham the offering of a herd after he had proved his willingness to offer his son Isaac. Now, I say the bestowment of all other gifts is easy, involving no suffering, no self-denial, as did the bestowment of Christ. 'How then shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?'

~~But of course the~~ expression 'all things,' unlimited as it is in the letter, must be limited in the spirit. Than the idea of God giving us all things that we might wish and ask for, ~~I hardly know there~~ ~~of anything~~ more perilous, more certain to prove destructive. ~~I don't know~~ what would become of ~~any of~~ us if God were in this unqualified manner to give us all things? There are in the text two words that are very important. They are the words '*with Him*,'—'shall He not with Him freely give us all things?' The 'all things' that He will give us are all things with Christ, and the

expression suggests a certain relationship of congruity or fitness. Suppose a man makes his son a present of a microscope, the probability is that he will with the instrument give him all the apparatus necessary for making full use of the instrument. Or if he gave his son a house, he might, perhaps, with the house give him the furniture suitable for it, that so he might with comfort live in the house that was given him. And God will give us, and freely give us, all things with Christ, all things that are connected with the gift of Christ, all things that will make the gift of Christ of practical service to us. So all things with Christ are all things that stand related to Christ, and to the purpose which God in the gift of Christ has in view. Nothing to frustrate that purpose, nothing that is beside that purpose. And therefore if things not related to Christ and to God's great design in sending Him be not given, this promise is not on that account falsified.

Never let us forget this limitation contained in the words 'with Him.' We may be poor: well, I do not think that we can establish a connection between Christ and great riches. Our temporal condition may be in many ways trying; but we cannot make out that the gift of Christ ought to bring with it the removal of all trials. Perhaps

it is discouraging to find the ‘all things’ thus limited, until they are very far from including all things, are reduced perhaps to comparatively few things.

But, again, I would observe that the promise of all things, all things that we might desire, all things that we might ask, would be much more of a threat than a promise, and the fulfilment of it much more a curse than a blessing. We must think of God’s purpose in bestowing the gift of His beloved Son; it was for our good, and within this motive we must, as a matter of course, limit the range of all else that He will give. Convinced of His love to us, convinced of this by the bestowment of the greatest gift that even He, with all His love and all His power, could bestow, we surely can leave it to Him to interpret to each of us this expression ‘all things.’ All things, Lord, that Thou seest good for us, just all such things and nothing more.

‘All things.’ Do not let us begin to think of health and wealth and other temporal advantages, and murmur if they are not conferred upon us in the measure we could wish. They do not come within the true scope of this great influence which Paul draws from God’s great kindness to us in the gift of Jesus Christ. But such things as these we

may look for as certain to be given ‘with Him.’ The pardon of all our sins. And this, if we analyze it, is not merely one thing, but ten thousand. You may aggregate them into one and call it pardon ; but it consists of as many pardons as there are sins that we have been guilty of. It is pardon every day, it is pardon every hour. This pardon, these pardons, will be given with Christ. For their bestowment was one of the great purposes for which God sent His Son into the world.

Another gift which God will not fail to grant with Christ is the Holy Spirit. And though there is, as St. Paul teaches us, one Spirit, there are diversities of gifts, and administrations, and operations, in and by that one Spirit. The gift of the Holy Ghost is one, and yet many. It is light for the understanding, it is strength for the will, it is sensibility for the conscience, it is purity for the affections, it is courage in the midst of fears, it is comfort in the midst of sorrows. A great and glorious gift, and one that God will ever give with Christ, because the gift of Christ, incomparable as it is, were, I had almost said, useless without the gift of the Spirit. Our Lord in effect said so when He addressed His disciples in these memorable words : ‘It is expedient for you that I

go away ; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you.'

And another gift that God will bestow with Christ is life eternal. And, brethren, I do not know, no man can know, how many gifts are comprised in this. For one thing, life in this world extends say to fourscore years ; how many fourscore years, that is, how many lives, each equal in duration to a long life here, shall we speak of as occupying the endless roll of the everlasting ages ? Thousands, millions of lives are included in the one gift of eternal life. And then all the culture of those ages : the advancement in knowledge, the effect of long and constant intercourse and fellowship with our Lord and with His perfected people. But eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive what good things God hath prepared for them that love Him. And this eternal life, this infinite succession of lives, all holy, useful, happy, honourable, and blessed, God will give with Christ. Certainly He will, for it is now that we really come to the great purpose for which God gave up His dear Son, even that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life. And apart from the gift of Christ no eternal life is to be had, for 'this is the record, that God hath

given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.' 'He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.'

And now, not to pursue the subject further, when we think of all the pardons of sin, each sin having its own distinct forgiveness on God's part; when we think of all the gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost; and when we think of the lives, of the infinite succession of lives, all joyful, pure, and blessed, which are included in the one wonderful word eternal life; when thus we reflect upon what God gives in connection with His glorious gift of Christ, we must feel that the promise is abundantly justified, that 'with Him' He will 'freely give us all things.'

But *with Him*; observe, with Him, not without Him. It may be that, without Christ, God will in His providence give ~~you~~ many things, and many good things too. He may give ~~you~~ health, He may give ~~you~~ riches, He may give ~~you~~ much worldly comfort and prosperity. But these His best gifts, really far the best, the gifts of His grace, in forgiveness, holiness, life eternal, He gives only with Christ, only to those who in faith and thankfulness accept Christ.

And He will give them freely. He gave us His dear Son freely. He did not even wait to be

asked to deliver Him up for us all. The gift of Christ was no answer to prayer. It was the purely spontaneous bounty of God. Nowhere in Scripture can we discern the slightest reluctance or hesitation on God's part as to the bestowment of that gift, great as was the suffering which it cost to the Giver as well as to the Gift. It was not to a world all penitent and in tears, prostrate at His throne in anguish and despair, that God gave His well-beloved Son; but to a world still at enmity against Him, still disobedient, impenitent, hard-hearted. And yet He gave Him freely. And therefore we surely may not, must not, think of any unwillingness on God's part to give these other gifts. Freely? Yes, of course. Whatever God gives, He gives freely. He loveth a cheerful giver, for He is Himself a cheerful giver! And there is not a gift of grace, there is not a gift that concerns us, whether for time or for eternity, that He will not freely give with Christ to all who ask Him.

But one word more. Is the giving to be all on God's part? I think that we might give the text such a turn as this: 'If God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall we not freely give *Him* all things?' In return for such love let us give Him ourselves, and all that

we are, and all that we have ; presenting ourselves to Him a living sacrifice, in thankfulness for the dying sacrifice He provided for us. This is but our reasonable service. We should surely be incapable of receiving from any friend some remarkable token of kindness without giving some expression of our gratitude. And I hope that on this occasion, our reflection upon the love of God in the gift of Christ will so move our hearts that we shall freely, and according to our power, give to His holy cause and service, helping His people here in the work which they have undertaken in His name and for His glory.

XXII.

A NEW YEAR'S SERMON.

'And the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto Me? Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward.'—Exodus xiv. 15.

THE Lord was not displeased with Moses because he prayed, but there was now something else for Moses to do. The hour of prayer was past, the hour for action had come. It was a strange command, and one that must have filled the people's hearts with amazement and terror. It was a command to march right onward to the sea, and down into its depths. There was no other way of escaping from the Egyptians who were in pursuit. The Israelites had no arms wherewith to fight their enemies, and if they had proceeded along the shore either to the right hand or to the left, they would have been very soon overtaken and captured, and led back again to bondage. 'Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward,'—forward to the sea, forward into the sea. Thus and thus

only could they save themselves from slavery, but it seemed to be a way of saving themselves from slavery at the sacrifice of their lives. The whole nation seemed to be commanded to commit a gigantic and sublime act of suicide ; to die, rather than be slaves. In the same sentence, however, in which Moses received this extraordinary command, he received also the promise that the sea should open a wide passage for the people, whereby they should cross to the other side ; and so the people, well prepared for such a trial of their faith by the miracles they had witnessed in Egypt, did not hesitate. With courageous hearts and unfaltering steps they moved forward, men, women, and children, every one of them, and so were they saved.

The command given to the children of Israel on that memorable day is one which God is ever giving to all His people, and which the Christian minister may very properly often urge upon his hearers. For we are all of us apt to lag and loiter over our spiritual course, standing still, even going backward, or at least making progress far too slow.

Our text furnishes us with an admirable motto for the present season, the beginning of a new year. Forward is the word which I should now

like to ring in every ear and every heart,—forward in all that is true, and just, and good.

There is a secular sense in which this motto may be understood and very usefully employed, as expressive of the desire and the determination to make progress in the world, to achieve success in business, to grapple with and overcome every obstacle that stands in the way of such advancement. And to this application of our motto, I am so far from entertaining any objection, that I wish it were far more than it is the rule approved, adopted, and carried out by every man. If it were so, there would be much less poverty and wretchedness in the world, and I firmly believe much less sin, for the course of life that leads to secular success is a course of life that requires the cultivation of many excellent qualities, and the exercise of much self-denial and self-control; and as it is a course of life that leaves no room for idleness, this alone guarantees the avoidance of much wickedness.

It may be said that the man who wishes to get on in the world, and bends his energies in this direction, exposes himself to many temptations, and this is true; but it is equally true that temptations, to the full as many, as strong, and as injurious, beset the man who leads a trifling, care-

less, and comparatively idle life. And although it may be objected that a life of intense application to secular business and great activity in the pursuit of success is likely to make a man worldly-minded, I don't hesitate to say, as the result of my observation and knowledge of men, that the indolent and the unsuccessful, down to the very pauper in the workhouse, are quite as worldly-minded as those who are most diligent and most prosperous. I firmly believe that he who is diligent in business is more likely than he who is slothful in business to be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. God's service needs the minds that are sharpened and brightened by the activities of business life; God's service requires the help that prosperity is able to afford. And therefore I have no fear, no hesitation in expressing the desire that every one of you may in this secular sense go forward, and have a year of progress and prosperity in the things of this present world.

But while fully recognising the wisdom and the importance of this motto as applicable to secular affairs, there is another, and as I believe a higher and a better sense in which it may be adopted. I do not scruple to advise any man, to advise every man, to try to become rich, and as rich as he can, if only I be permitted to premise

that there are other riches and better riches than money, and the things that are convertible into money :—the true riches of which our Saviour speaks, the unsearchable riches of Christ of which St. Paul speaks, the being rich in faith, and rich in good works. In these things it behoves us not to be poor ; in the pursuit and the acquisition of these things it behoves us to go forward. And these riches are neither uncertain nor unsatisfying.

There is no uncertainty either as to obtaining them, or as to retaining them ; and no successful worldling derives from his riches such joy as this spiritual wealth gives to him who is found to possess it.

It may be that in regard to secular life many a man really cannot go forward. It may be that he has to go round and round day by day in a rather dull routine of work and duty, from which there is no escape into any path of onward and upward progress ; and to him the cry, ‘Forward,’ understood in a secular sense, may seem like mockery, it may be a word to which he can make no response. Well, I suppose all men cannot be ever going forward in the world ; many, indeed, are very thankful if the pressure of hard times do not drive them backward ; it is all they can do to hold their

ground. Poor health, the expense of bringing up a large family, the advance of age with its infirmities, constitute a continual struggle; and if some such sorely pressed men be here, I desire to express the very sincere sympathy which I feel for them.

But, my brothers, in this life's battle this motto, though it may seem to mock you when taken in a secular sense, has a far greater meaning in which it does not speak mockingly to you. In regard to making progress in moral and spiritual things, in regard to the acquisition of the best riches, of what, according to Jesus Christ, are the only true, the only real riches, you stand on the same footing with those who have the finest opportunities of advancement in the world. And I ask you to assert your self-respect, and if the world respect none but the worldly rich, don't you echo back such a contemptible and abominable sentiment by repining, on the ground that comparatively mean circumstances, from which you cannot escape, keep you down and keep you back. Neither a man's life nor a man's worth consisteth in the abundance of the things that he possesseth. And if you cannot go forward in the direction of money-making, be all the more resolved to go forward in the direction of acquiring the riches of righteous-

ness and grace and glory. If on the lower level your path is blocked up, try the higher level, the more intellectual, the more spiritual level; that is never blocked to any earnest man;—progress, useful progress, progress to any extent, is always possible there.

‘ Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward.’ There is the Israel after the spirit, as well as the Israel after the flesh, and I speak to the children of Israel when I speak to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is God’s command to such that they go forward.

Brethren, let us go forward in Christian knowledge. In this our attainments vary, but none of us have reached the limits beyond which further advancement is impossible. I have been studying the Christian religion, studying seriously the Word of God for many years: I take no credit to myself for this, it has been a matter of duty, it has been a matter of necessity, it has been my business, the work that I have had to do for you, to say nothing of myself; and it is a fine thing now to feel that, so far from having exhausted this subject, and so far from being exhausted by the work of examining it, I am, as it were, only beginning, and can and do take a truer interest than ever in the new truths,

and new aspects of old truths, which are perpetually being disclosed.

Here revelation seems to be quite on a par with nature ; this one book is equal to the entire universe as a repertory of wisdom and knowledge. I don't suppose that there is any earnest student of Scripture, any Christian writer, who, however long he may have made the Bible his study, would hesitate to say of it what Sir Isaac Newton, at the close of his career, said of the study of nature,—that he had been like a child playing with pebbles on the shore, while the wide ocean of truth lay before him unexplored. I wonder how long an intelligent, studious Christian would have to live before he could grow weary of the Bible, or feel that he could gather from it no more instruction, no more consolation ! Standing near the border of the land (for more than thirty years of scriptural study have brought me only just within the border), I see such a wide expanse of fruitful plains, and beautiful valleys, and noble streams, and sublime mountains, that I verily believe the exploration of all would fill a life longer than Methuselah's. Well may we say—

‘ ‘Tis a broad land of wealth unknown,
Where springs of life arise,
Seeds of immortal bliss are sown,
And hidden glory lies !’

I do not wish to discourage the reading of religious books written by good and earnest men ; but I do wish to urge to the utmost the study of the Scriptures. This is really the pathway to religious knowledge.

If our faith be in danger of being shaken by the assaults of scepticism, I am very sure that the best way of having our faith confirmed is to search the Scriptures. The assurance of its divine authority derived from the intelligent and honest study of this book, is worth far more than all the arguments that are founded on other considerations. As the proverb says, it is like taking a torch to show us the sun, when we take any human composition to prove the divine origin of the Scriptures. They are their own best evidence, and infidelity would make small progress if all men would but read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them. Small chance also would false and foolish doctrines and ceremonies have, if the Word of God were diligently studied by all who profess and call themselves Christians. What tremendous satire there is in the Italian proverb, ‘With the gospel a man becomes a heretic !’ Yes, he does. With the gospel he can no longer be imposed upon by the so-called orthodoxy of the Catholic Church.

I say, then, let us go forward in the advancement of Christian knowledge, and let us do so mainly by study of God's Word. We have none of us gone very far in this best of all the sciences. On every page of Scripture there is some passage that contains gems of truth that we have never seen ; in every chapter of the Bible there is some instruction, some comfort, that we have never found. Each time we traverse the paths in Scripture that are traversed most, we may, if careful and observant, see something new that is well worth seeing. I hope I am entitled to speak as one having some experience, and I am sure, my Christian friends, that there really is no end of spiritual profit and enjoyment to be had in this delightful study.

I hesitate to interfere with any man's course of reading, but I think that if some of us read less of the poor trash that is so popular, and made Moses, and David, and Solomon, and Isaiah, and Paul, and John our favourite authors, we should have brighter, stronger, manlier minds than we are likely to have through feeding on the infinitely less wholesome material which some are in the habit of devouring. There were in the apostle's time those whom he blamed because when, for the time they had had to learn, they ought to have

been teachers, they were mere babes in Christian knowledge. Let not this censure be applicable to us. When Jesus said to Philip, ‘Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip?’ He said what might be said to many of us. So long a time with Jesus, so long a time believing in Him, so long a time professing our faith in Him, and yet knowing so little of Him! Is there not much reason to ‘speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward’?

Let us go forward in Christian knowledge; let us also go forward in Christian character. And if you ask, What is Christian character? I think the answer most true and most simple is this:—Christian character is Christ-like character, and what I mean by going forward in Christian character is going forward in the imitation of Christ, going forward in following His example. That is a grand word of His that He said to every one whom He called to discipleship, ‘Follow me’! Of course the first thing is to believe in Christ, to trust in Him for pardon and eternal life. But is there not some reason to fear that some of us lay a stress, not too strong but too exclusive, upon this one duty of believing? We take up Paul’s words addressed to the Philippian jailer, ‘Believe on the

Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,' and we treat the subject as though Paul had said nothing else to the jailer, whereas after that grand introduction he 'spake to him the word of the Lord,' and undoubtedly this word, 'Follow me.' There are many who rest satisfied with believing in Jesus, or with believing that they believe in Jesus, and they shrink from following Him. Now, believing should only be the step necessary as preparatory to following Him. You believe in Him, my friend? Pardon my asking you, are you following Him? For if not, that belief of yours is open to very grave suspicion. I do not give much for a sick man's confidence in his physician, if he do not follow the physician's instructions.

Now, it must be admitted that every one who really trusts in Christ does follow Him, so far. But how do we get on in this department of Christian progress? I know some who have followed Jesus as far as Jordan, as far as His baptism, and stopped short there. Let not us Baptists blame the baptismal regenerationists, who hold that baptism is effectual to salvation, unless we are sure that we do not practically hold the same thing in this form, that once we have professed Christ in baptism, we think ourselves

safe, and feel no further concern about spiritual things.

Brethren, when I say, Let us go forward in Christian character,—which is in other words to go forward in following the footsteps of our Lord, in imitating His character, in being like Him,—there is much scope for us all. We may have gone far upon this path, but we have much further yet to go. See how greatly He is in advance of the foremost of us! Our proper place is to be side by side with Him, keeping pace with Him, step by step in steady, measured, unfaltering advance along the path of holiness; but we lag behind, and in some of the steps that He takes we feel ourselves very unwilling to follow Him. Christian friends, these things ought not so to be. Let us go forward in humility and lowliness of mind, forward in temperance and self-denial and purity, forward in patience and kindness, forward in truth and courage, forward in everything wherein He has left us an example that we should follow His steps.

And let us go forward in Christian work. It may be said, I know, that advancement in Christian knowledge and in Christian character, is so much advancement in Christian work. Yes, certainly it is, and the progressive formation of Christian

character is distinctly and decidedly the greatest and the best of all Christian work,—the greatest, the best, the most arduous. But now, when I speak of Christian work, I mean such Christian work as lies outside ourselves, the Christian work that is not exactly personal but relative ; work for Christ in our homes, in the congregation, in the world.

Christian work in our homes ! For many of us there is scope there. It is a field of Christian labour not to be neglected ; and I pray God that none of us, whom Christian work in the church and in the world so much occupies, may forget our own vineyards and the young plants there. Of this there is some danger ; I have often seen it ; seen a man's own family go to moral wreck and ruin, while he was devoting all his spare time to the salvation of others ; and that home wreck, that untidy house, that disorderly family, have formed an obstacle to the good man's success in his religious endeavours with the world. The Apostle Paul was careful to note this, and imperatively required those who engaged in any public work for Christ, that they should rule their children and their own houses well. Charity begins at home, and so does religion.

But home well provided for, not only temporally but also spiritually, there is Christian work to be

done in the church, or, as I prefer to say, the congregation with which a Christian man is connected. Each Christian congregation and a church (in its original signification) is simply a congregation of Christians; each such congregation or church, call it by what name you will, ought to provide, and if there be much religious life in it will provide, work for its members, and encouragement for them to engage in it. And within the limits of the congregation all Christian men and women may find some good and useful work to do. If any of you ask for some such work, I can soon find it for you.

But further, we have a work to do in the world. In one sense Christianity is the most unworldly, in another the most worldly of all religions. The most unworldly, because it is so utterly opposed to the spirit of the world,—the most worldly, because it is so entirely devoted to the welfare of the world. It removes all geographical and ethnical boundaries. It takes a precisely equal interest in all lands and all peoples. It knows neither Greek nor Jew, neither bond nor free; it only knows men as men lost through sin, and redeemed by Christ. Most other religions are and have been satisfied with some small portion of the globe; most other religions are and have been rather exclusive than aggressive.

Christianity is a religion so ambitious, that it will not rest until Christ has conquered all mankind, and its divine preacher's last command was, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.' And so we have a work for Christ in the world, the work of bringing the world to the knowledge, the faith, and the obedience of Christ.

But not to lose ourselves in so vast a field of operation, let us consider most attentively and seriously our Christian work in the world as the world is immediately around us. Liverpool is in the first place our world, the world which most nearly concerns us, and so we are placed in a position of responsibility towards it. 'Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward ;' and we must go forward into this Red Sea of ignorance and sin and misery. If there be, as facts seem to show, something peculiarly bad in the moral state of Liverpool, it is humiliating, it is discouraging ; and yet after all, provided we are faithful, laborious, courageous, what spot on the face of the earth ought we more to desire, as the most honourable of all posts, than one in which the devil's power is so strong as it seems to be here ? I fear that we are not going forward. The host of God's elect in this town appears to

be with difficulty holding its ground ; nay, rather, it is being beaten backward. There is a powerful enemy whose interest it is to debauch the people of the town, to degrade them, to brutalize them, to make them paupers, madmen, and criminals ; and that interest, established in its thousands of strongholds, rules the place, checked, if at all, neither rigorously nor heartily by those to whom the good order and good conduct of the place are officially entrusted.

And the time seems to have arrived when Christian people must seriously consider whether our old mode of warfare is adapted to the present state of things. I advocate no change of weapons ; no, let us have the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit. But how and when these trusty and well - proved weapons are to be wielded ? that is the question. I begin to think that what good William Carey said about the heathen in India has now to be said in regard to the heathen here, ‘I’ll go down into the pit, brothers, if you will hold the ropes !’ And more of us must go down into this pit of darkness and of death, more of us than have adventured it yet. Let us not be disheartened ; let us confess that churches and chapels have to a large extent failed. Churches and chapels are

not the gospel, churches and chapels are not the only means for furthering the cause of the gospel. No; let the living temples of the Holy Ghost, Christian men and women, move about more in the midst of the people, by good examples, gentle words, and kind deeds, seeking to win souls. More contact of spiritual light and life with the spiritual darkness and death will certainly do much. And if churches will regard their ministers not merely as their religious instructors, but as their missionaries, their evangelists, and not only permit them but encourage them, and even require them and enable them to go and do more than hitherto they have had the opportunity of doing amongst the ignorant and the degraded, God will bless such efforts too.

In the days of the apostles there was a synagogue at Athens, and Paul preached there; but, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry, his spirit was so stirred within him that he could not confine himself to the synagogue, but went out and disputed daily in the market-place, and met the crowds of people on Mars Hill, facing boldly and unflinchingly all their scorn and all their opposition. There is a lesson here which churches and ministers must learn if they are to go forward with their Christian work in the world.

'Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward.'

But there may be some here to whom all this exhortation, touching the going forward in Christian knowledge, character, and work, is premature. This going forward must be from a certain starting-point, and that starting-point is Christ's cross. Thither we must all go first there to receive the inspiration that shall send us gladly on our Christian course in knowledge, character, and work. And some of you, my friends, know that to the cross of Christ you have not come. You have seen it afar off; being attracted by it, you have drawn near, with softened heart and tearful eyes, beholding Him who hangs there—a bleeding, dying Saviour; you have come almost to its foot, but you have drawn back again; you have not in trust and love surrendered yourself to Christ.

In saying to you, go forward, in entreating you to go forward, I can only mean go forward to that cross. That is the first step, the all-important, the entirely indispensable step, from the taking of which all true progress must begin. Take that step, my friend; a step which none who have taken it repent of having taken; the step that for ever decides your destiny; the step that separates you from guilt, from condemnation, from death. Take

it; take it now. Thus begin the year, and then with the rest of the children of Israel, with the rest of the true people of God, go forward in knowledge, character, and work, to your own great joy, and to God's great glory. Amen. *Jas.*

THE END.

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